SUNNY BOY AND HIS CAVE

RAMY ALLISON WHITE

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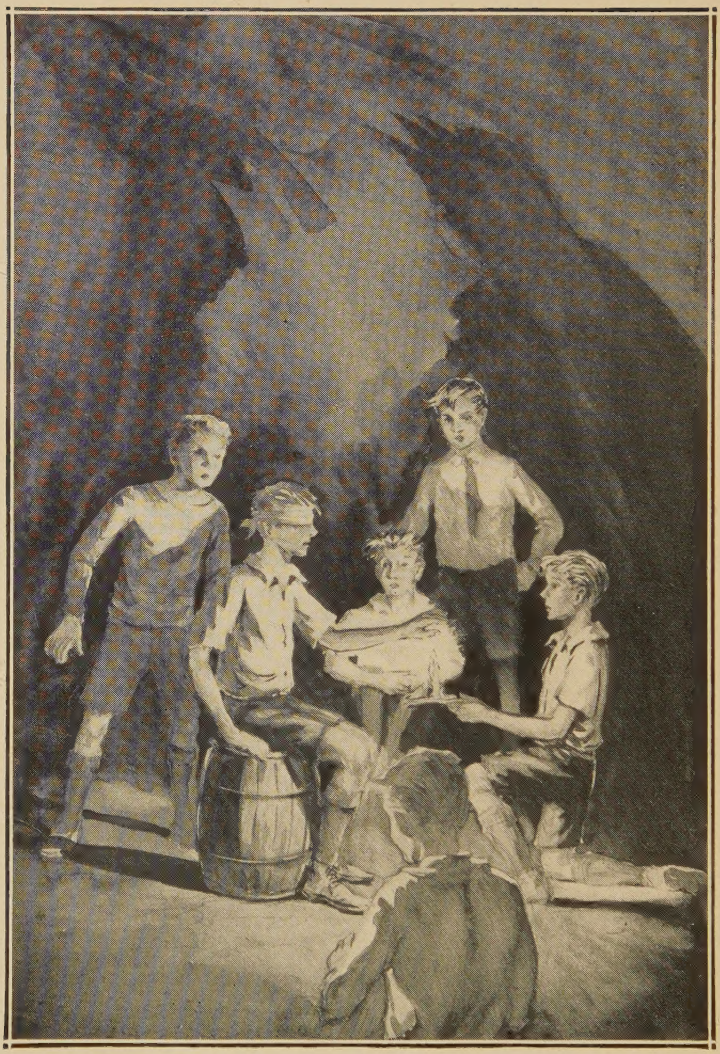

Oliver hesitated, then held out his hand

Sunny Boy and His Cave *Frontispiece*

SUNNY BOY AND HIS CAVE

BY

RAMY ALLISON WHITE

Author of

"SUNNY BOY IN THE COUNTRY," "SUNNY BOY AND HIS GAMES," "SUNNY BOY AT WILLOW FARM," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

JOHN M. FOSTER

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SUNNY BOY AND HIS CAVE

CHAPTER I

A PICNIC DAY

"SUNNY BOY! Sh! Say, Sunny Boy, will you come here a minute?"

Sunny Boy Horton looked very earnestly at the cellar doors. They were folded back, and apparently one of them was speaking to him!

"Sh! Sunny Boy, will you *please* come here a minute?" said the cellar door again.

This time, to his relief, Sunny Boy Horton saw the edge of a pink hat bobbing above the door. Ruth Baker wore a pink hat. It must be that Ruth was hiding and wanted to tell him something.

Sunny Boy walked toward the cellar, and, sure enough, under one of the hinged doors was a little girl in a pink dress and pink hat.

"Oh, Sunny Boy!" cried Ruth Baker, who wore these, "something awful has happened."

"Is it going to rain?" asked Sunny Boy anxiously.

This was a picnic day, and of course you understand that the weather was most important.

"No-o, I don't believe it will rain," Ruth said slowly. "My daddy read the paper and it said 'Fair.' But my two girl cousins have come to see us. They're in the house now."

Sunny Boy was puzzled. He didn't see anything so "awful" about having girl cousins come to visit.

"Nelson said," Ruth explained, "that there won't be room for them unless I stay at home! We didn't know they were coming," she added.

"Nelson's teasing you," said Sunny Boy wisely. "I guess there is plenty of room. If

they can't go in your car, they can go in ours. Or you and Nelson can ride with us and let the cousins go in your car."

Down the kitchen steps came Harriet, who kept house for Sunny Boy's mother.

"What in the world are you two whispering about?" asked Harriet.

She carried a large box under each arm and when Sunny Boy told her what Nelson had said, Harriet laughed.

"Nelson may have been afraid there wouldn't be enough sandwiches for him," she said. "That is most likely what worried him. But you tell that young man there will be room enough for extra visitors and plenty to eat, too," and Harriet went out to the car with the two large boxes of lunch.

Ruth Baker, glad to have the matter settled, hurried back into her house. The Bakers lived next door to the Hortons, and Ruth had wanted to ask Sunny Boy's advice without letting her cousins hear her; she thought their feelings

might be hurt if they guessed they were upsetting picnic plans.

Sunny Boy raced after Harriet. Glenn Avenue was a busy street this morning. There were half a dozen cars lined up, and boys and girls and fathers and mothers were scurrying in and out of the various houses. The picnic was supposed to "start early"; but here it was quarter of nine, and no one was ready yet.

"Wonder why they tie all the boxes with strings," a plump lad sitting on the curb remarked to Sunny Boy.

"So you boys can't get the lids off and eat everything up before it's dinner time," a little girl retorted.

Sunny Boy laughed and the fat Oliver Dunlap grinned good-naturedly.

Jessie Smiley, the little girl who had answered him, knew what was in the boxes, she said.

"My mother made chicken and ham and egg sandwiches," recited Jessie. "And chocolate

cake. And—and salad. And lemonade. My mother can make anything."

Goodness, this was too much for the other children swarming in and out of the cars—they had all been told to sit down and keep quiet, but no one could sit still long.

Sunny Boy had to tell about the lunch Harriet had packed—he had watched her and his mother had helped; Lottie Carr and Dorothy Peters knew all about their mothers' cakes and stuffed eggs and cookies; Nelson Baker, who was certainly not troubling himself about entertaining the girl cousins, declared his mother had made loaves and loaves of nut bread.

"I wish we could eat now," said Jimmie Butterworth, with a sigh.

Those boxes and baskets already in the cars really wouldn't have been safe another minute if a whistle had not sounded just then.

"That's Daddy!" cried Sunny Boy joyfully. "That's the starting signal."

Mothers came hurrying out of the front doors,

boys and girls raced each for the family's car. There seemed to be a small army of boys tumbling into the front and back seats—Sunny Boy Horton, Nelson Baker, Jimmie Butterworth, Oliver Dunlap, Perry Phelps, Carleton March and Leslie Bradin, all good chums, all about the same age.

When the Bakers came out Sunny Boy saw the two girl cousins—little girls who wore glasses and looked very sedate and not a bit excited. Ruth Baker was excited enough for the whole family, her daddy said. Ruth loved picnics.

Nelson Baker and Jimmie Butterworth came and rode with Mr. and Mrs. Horton and Sunny Boy in their car—it was the first and Nelson said he thought it was more fun to ride ahead of everyone else.

There was really a parade, when the line finally got under way. Sunny Boy, looking back, counted eight cars. There were a number of families on the block in which there were no children, but they had come to the picnic,

much to Sunny Boy's surprise. He told Harriet that he never knew before that grown-up people like picnics.

"Why, Sunny Boy Horton!" cried Harriet. "What about your father and mother?"

"Well, fathers and mothers are different," Sunny Boy said to that.

"Where are we going?" asked Jimmie Butterworth.

He sat, with Sunny Boy and Nelson Baker, on the back seat, while Mrs. Horton rode with Mr. Horton in front.

"Golden Falls," said Sunny Boy absently, tugging at his pocket.

"I—want—to show you something!" he gasped, falling over against Jimmie as he jerked a handkerchief, rolled into a tight ball, out of his pocket.

"What's it all wrapped up for?" Nelson inquired curiously.

"So I wouldn't break it," explained Sunny Boy. "It's valuable."

He unfolded the handkerchief and held out something small and round and flat.

"What is it?" asked Jimmie and Nelson together.

"It's a compass," Sunny Boy replied. "My Grandpa Horton gave it to me. You can steer a ship with a compass."

The other boys looked at the compass with great interest. They didn't understand much about it, but they admired the tiny swinging needle and the polished case.

Sunny Boy wrapped the compass again in his handkerchief and stuffed it in his pocket.

"There's no use letting the girls see it," he said. "Girls can't appreciate a compass. Besides, they might break the glass."

The cars had passed through Centronia by this time, and were on a road that was one of the main thoroughfares. Everyone who passed them waved to the happy picnickers, and the boys and girls in the houses along the road waved too.

"I'll bet they wish they were going," said Jimmie Butterworth.

"Perhaps they'll have a picnic to go to tomorrow," Sunny Boy offered hopefully. He would so like everyone to go to a picnic as nice as this one he himself was looking forward to.

"Or maybe they went to a picnic yesterday," suggested Mr. Horton.

"That's so," Nelson agreed. "My father says there is a picnic every day at Golden Falls in the summer."

So it was decided that the children who waved to the parade of cars must certainly have been on a picnic or be going on a picnic at least once that summer.

"What *is* that queer noise?" asked Mrs. Horton. "I've been hearing it for some time now. Listen, Daddy!"

"Don't hear anything," said Mr. Horton, after listening a second or two. "May be a spring squeaking."

Mrs. Horton shook her head.

"No, it doesn't sound like that," she said.

"I do hear something!" declared Mr. Horton. "Comes from under the back seat."

He couldn't turn around, but Mrs. Horton did. Just as she glanced over her shoulder, out from under the seat rolled a basket and out of the basket rolled four, fat, squirming, squeaking little puppies!

"Dogs!" cried Jimmie Butterworth, in great delight. Picnic puppies! Where did they come from?"

"They—they're mine," Sunny Boy stammered in some confusion.

CHAPTER II

GOLDEN FALLS

THE four puppies sprawled over the floor of the car, whining sorrowfully.

"Oh, the poor little things!" said Mrs. Horton. "Pick them up, boys; don't let them hurt themselves. Where on earth did you get four puppies, Sunny Boy?"

"I bought them," Sunny Boy explained. "They're very nice dogs, Mother. The boy said when they grow up they'll be worth a fortune."

Mrs. Horton laughed and patted one of the sleek little black heads.

"Unfortunately, dear, we can't have four puppies," she said. "We have no place to keep them. And I certainly don't see what we're going to do with them to-day."

Mr. Horton had to watch the road, but he could hear all that was said.

"How could you buy the puppies, Sunny Boy?" he asked now. "Dogs that are worth a fortune must be expensive."

"Well, they have to grow up before they're worth a fortune, Daddy," answered Sunny Boy. "I paid this boy—his name is Beans Campbell and he lives on the street back of us—ten cents and my pocketknife. The reason he was willing to sell the puppies cheap is because he has three more."

Sunny Boy was holding two of the dogs and Jimmie and Nelson each had one. They were very cunning black puppies with white marks on their ears. But Mrs. Horton said she didn't think they were at all valuable.

"Even if they were," she declared firmly, "we couldn't keep them. Why, Sunny Boy, can you imagine four puppies growing up in our little house and in our small yard? We'd have to move away and let the dogs have the place."

Sunny Boy had to admit that he hadn't thought about the four puppies growing up. Four pups didn't take much space, but four dogs might want a good deal of room.

"They might grow pretty big, too," Nelson Baker reminded him. "If they all grew up to be St. Bernards they'd be in the way."

"Yes, and I don't believe Harriet would like four dogs," said Sunny Boy. "They might bark and make her nervous. But what can I do with them, Mother?"

Mrs. Horton said she thought the best thing to do was to give them back to the Campbell boy.

"He can find homes for them," she said. "I'm sorry you brought them along, Sunny Boy—we'll have to take care of them all day."

"I know of a better plan," declared Mr. Horton. "Here comes Pete Scarro, and he'll take them back with him. He can find this Carrot Campbell and give him back his property."

"Not Carrot, Daddy," urged Sunny Boy. "It's Beans Campbell."

Mr. Horton laughed and the boys leaned out of the car to hail Pete Scarro who was a good friend of them all.

Pete was a vegetable huckster and he knew practically every man, woman and child in the section of Centronia where Sunny Boy lived. He was a fat, good-natured man, and he readily agreed to take the puppies back to the Campbell boy. Pete had been out to a farm to buy fresh vegetables to sell to his customers, and was on his way home. He said it would be no trouble at all to take the little dogs.

While Mr. Horton is talking to the huckster, perhaps we'd better tell you a little bit about Sunny Boy. Very likely you're acquainted with him—that is, if you've read the first book about him, called "Sunny Boy in the Country." In that case, you not only know him, but you know Grandpa Horton, who gave him the wonderful compass. Sunny Boy and his grandpa

were the best of friends and they dearly loved to visit each other.

But Sunny Boy had other friends, too. He had friends wherever he went, at home in Centronia, at the seashore, in New York. He invented games for the other children to play, he got lost and went traveling with a circus, much to his own surprise. In fact, he was one of the busiest small boys you ever knew. In the book just before this one, entitled, "Sunny Boy at Willow Farm," he and his daddy and mother boarded at a beautiful country place and there Sunny Boy made more new friends and had a most exciting time of it when he was washed away in an old boathouse during a storm.

Whatever happened to him, he could usually smile, which may be the reason he was called Sunny Boy—he was smiling as Pete Scarro drove away, the four puppies crying, Yip-yapp! Ki-ki-yip-yapp! in the basket on the seat beside him.

"Now we can't hold up this picnic another in-

stant," said Mr. Horton, for all the cars had stopped behind them, though he had motioned to them to go ahead.

Another half hour of driving brought them to Golden Falls. Such a perfect place for a picnic! Most of the children had been there before, but they always tumbled out of the cars with shrieks of admiration and delight. There was a thick grove of trees, where it was always shady and cool, even on the warmest day. A little way past the trees a roaring brook made as much noise as a big river. Sunny Boy said so, and he ought to know, because he had had experience with rivers. This brook dashed over stones and ran under the roots of trees and was never still. There was a waterfall, too; not a large one, but it was very pretty and often one could see rainbows dancing in the foam it made.

The children made for the water as soon as they were out of the cars. They even forgot the lunch—for a few moments—because there was so much to see in the brook.

"I wish I'd brought my father's fishing rod," mourned Jimmie Butterworth.

"Nelson, Mother says we can play with you," announced Ruth Baker, coming up to her brother.

Poor Ruth was used to playing with Sunny Boy and her brother and she didn't like the way Nelson had gone off and left her with the two girl cousins. She introduced them now to Sunny Boy.

"These are my cousins, Gertrude and Evelyn Baker," said Ruth politely.

"Is the water deep?" asked Gertrude.

"Awfully deep," Nelson, who loved to tease, replied.

Gertrude had blue eyes and Evelyn had brown eyes, otherwise they looked just alike, Sunny Boy decided. They were dressed alike, too, which made it harder to tell them apart.

"It isn't so very deep," said Sunny Boy kindly. "We've been wading in it lots of times. Haven't we, Ruth?"

Ruth nodded, watching Jimmie Butterworth teetering on a rock.

"That's the rock we call the rocking chair," explained Sunny Boy. "It rocks up and down. You can't fall in."

Jimmie jumped off the rock and Sunny Boy sprang lightly on it. Up and down went the rock, and Sunny Boy waved his arms gayly.

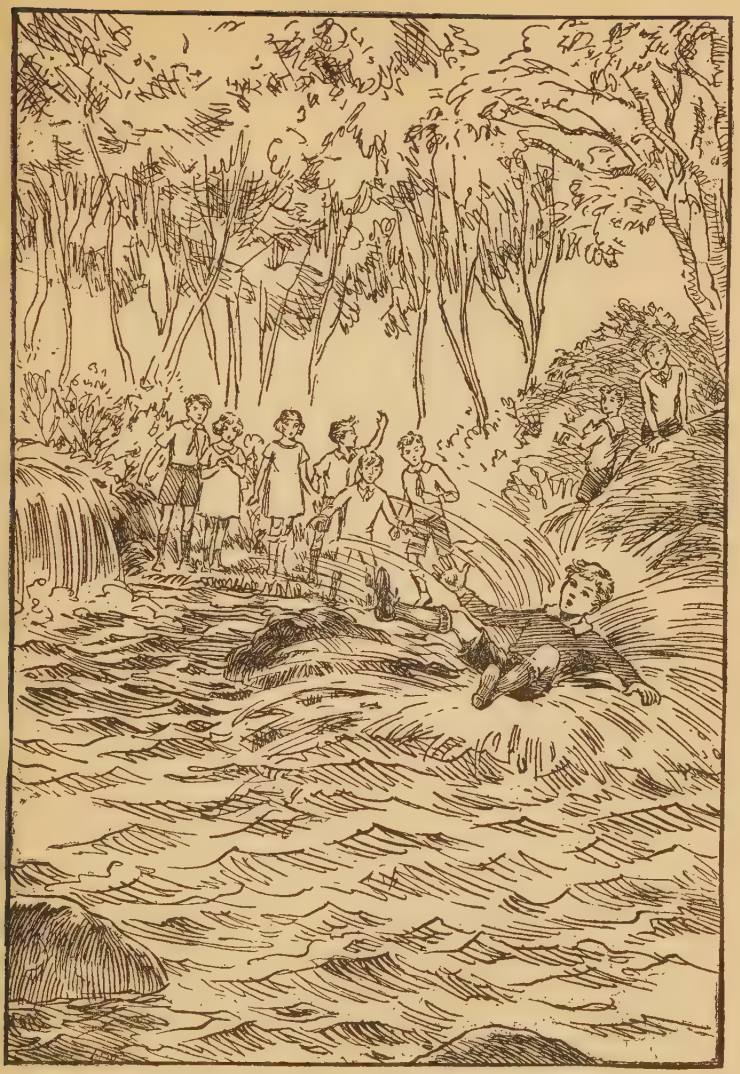
"Clickety clack, clear the track!" he cried, leaning backward for what he afterward explained was to have been "one good rock."

But the gay Sunny Boy leaned too far back, lost his balance, and his feet slid over the rock and let him down with a loud and cheerful splash into the very cold water.

"Sunny Boy!" cried a chorus of voices. "Oh, Sunny Boy, did you hurt yourself?"

Mr. Horton had seen what had happened and he came running. The water wasn't deep and he had Sunny Boy out in a moment.

"Only half of me is wet," Sunny Boy declared, trying not to let his teeth chatter.



The gay Sunny Boy leaned too far back

Well, that half of him was certainly very wet indeed and the rest of him was more than a little damp. Everyone gathered around him and looked at him.

"I think we'd better undress him and rub him with a heavy towel," said his mother. "Then he can wear his bathing suit and Daddy's heavy sweater. We'll spread his clothes out and they'll dry in this hot sun."

So Sunny Boy and his daddy went into the grove, and there Sunny Boy took off his wet clothes and his daddy rubbed him hard with one of the towels they had brought, and then Sunny Boy put on his red bathing suit. His daddy's sweater on him was as long as a bathrobe, and it was very comfortable, after the sleeves were turned back.

When the other boys saw Sunny Boy they all wanted to wear their bathing suits, but the mothers said, no, more children might fall in the brook before lunch; if no one did, then, after eating, bathing suits might be worn.

Mrs. Horton hung up Sunny Boy's clothes on bushes in the bright sunshine and then the serious business of getting lunch ready began.

The girls set the tables and the boys sat in a row on the bank of the brook and watched the small fish darting in and out and pretended they were not hungry. But it was noticed that as soon as Mrs. Horton said, "All ready, if you are!" that not a boy loitered.

"You can't go in bathing if you eat too much," said Jessie Smiley warningly.

"If you wait a while, you'll be all right," Mrs. Baker said more kindly.

Dear me, what delicious things came out of those baskets and boxes! Everyone's mother had made marvelous things to eat, and Sunny Boy found that those people who didn't have children and who still liked to come to picnics could also cook things that pleased boys and girls. It was fun, too, to be allowed to hold a sandwich in one hand and a tomato in the other and a paper plate with other goodies on it in

your lap, and not be scolded if you "took turns" taking a bit from first one hand, then the other. At picnics, you know, no one really minds if you do spill a few things, and if you drop a sandwich in the water, why it isn't exactly wasted, for the fish will like it and your mother will give you another.

The grown-ups stayed at the flat rock which was the lunch table longer than the children. The youngsters were not allowed to go in the water at once, but they played games for an hour or so after finishing their meal. Then they put on their bathing suits and went splashing into the brook.

"Br-rr! Cold!" they shrieked, one after the other.

But the water didn't stay cold. Or the children grew warm, perhaps. However it was, in less than five minutes after they had jumped in, they were as much at home in the clear, noisy little stream as the darting fishes.

"Play explorer, Sunny Boy!" urged Ruth Baker. "Please play explorer!"

Ruth liked Sunny Boy's games, and so did the others.

"All right, come on," said Sunny Boy. "We'll hunt for wild tigers in the forest. Forward, my brave men!"

"Ow-ow!" cried Gertrude, in sudden fright. "Are there really tigers around here?"

Nelson gazed at his cousin in great disgust, but Sunny Boy was patient.

"It's just a game," he explained. "We pretend to hunt tigers. This is a jungle stream and we're hunting."

The two little girl cousins lagged behind, but the other children scrambled over the rocks after Sunny Boy.

"Look! A camp!" whispered Nelson presently.

"Savages!" hissed Jimmie Butterworth.

It was only a game, of course, but it did make a little shiver go up and down the backs of the

gay little bathing suits when Jimmie hissed like that. He was pointing to Sunny Boy's clothes hung on the bushes.

Sunny Boy, oddly enough, didn't look. He stared in the other direction till Jimmie touched his arm.

"Shall we explore that enemy camp?" asked Jimmie.

"No-o, let's go back toward the waterfall," Sunny Boy said.

The others didn't see why they should go back the way they had just come, but they didn't argue, just followed Sunny Boy. Then, when they had almost reached the waterfall, Mrs. Horton called to them and said it was time to come out of the water.

"You'll have time to dress and then rest a bit," she said. "Everyone is to stay quiet for twenty minutes before we begin to pack up to go home. We don't want to be cross and tired when we get home to-night."

Sunny Boy's clothes were dry. He put them

on slowly. Nelson was grumbling because he didn't want to stop playing in the water and Jimmie was grunting because his shoes wouldn't lace themselves.

"Everybody quiet for twenty minutes!" called Mr. Horton.

Sunny Boy scarcely heard him. He buttoned the cuffs of his blouse and whispered to himself:

"I wonder if that was a bear I saw?"

CHAPTER III

TRAILING A BEAR

SUNNY BOY had to make three attempts before he finally buttoned the last button. He wasn't watching what he was doing, but instead was gazing through the trees. Before he had made up his mind about the bear, Jimmie Butterworth and the other boys were lying flat on their backs on the grass, their heads pillowed on their arms. The little girls had put their heads in their mothers' laps, and everything was very quiet.

"I'm sure it was a bear," said Sunny Boy to himself. Sunny Boy had seen something dark and shadowy through the trees. The more he thought about it, the surer he was that he had seen a bear.

Sunny Boy wasn't especially afraid of bears.

He had been close to them in the circus and he thought baby bears were as cunning as woolly dogs; but he thought very likely the rest of the people at the picnic might be frightened if a bear walked in to join their party. The girls, particularly. Sunny Boy knew the girls would scream!

"I'll just go and see if it *was* a bear," he told himself.

He slipped behind the bush where his clothes had been hung to dry and found a little path all ready for him to follow. He didn't see any bear tracks, to be sure. But that wasn't a sign, he argued; a bear might not leave any tracks except in the snow. Sunny Boy had seen pictures of bear tracks across white snow.

He didn't think what he was to say or do if he did meet a bear, but all his attention was set on discovering what it was he had seen—for all he knew, it might have been a wolf. It might even have been a tiger, he reasoned, because sometimes tigers escaped from their cages.

The path was easy to follow for some distance and then underbrush began to break into it. Sunny Boy had to push his way through strong, prickery bushes and what he called "baby trees" that sometimes rapped him smartly on the head and across the face with their branches.

"I don't see how the bear ever got through this!" gasped Sunny Boy, rubbing his cheek where it smarted from a stinging twig that had struck him.

Indeed, the bear must have been a very thin one, if he ever got through, or even around, some of the bushes and undergrowth that the determined lad hunting him pushed through.

"Perhaps I'd better go back," said Sunny Boy aloud, when he found that the woods were getting thicker and thicker.

But he didn't know how to go back! He discovered that at about the same moment that he discovered it was growing darker!

"I'm not exactly lost," Sunny Boy announced

to a bird sitting on a low branch of a tree, "but that path is certainly hard to find."

The bird chirped politely and then rose straight into the air and flew away.

"Dear me, you remind me that I must get home and give the children their supper," the bird seemed to say.

It was easy enough for a bird to fly away home, but Sunny Boy Horton had not the slightest idea where his home was. At first he thought perhaps a thunderstorm was coming up. But when it didn't thunder or lighten, he decided it was growing darker because it was getting to be night.

"A path can't get lost," Sunny Boy tried to reassure himself. "That path must be around here somewhere. All I have to do is to find it and then go back the same way I came."

However, he had left the path farther back than he remembered. He scrambled about among the bushes and scratched his face and

hands, but try as he would, he couldn't find the path.

Spat! Something wet fell on his anxious little nose. Spatter! Wet spots appeared on his scratched little hands. Spat, spat, spat! A little patter sounded on the leaves all around him.

"Why!" cried Sunny Boy, in astonishment. "Why! It's raining!"

This wasn't very cheerful. No one likes to be out in the woods all alone at night with the rain coming down. That is, unless the someone has a campfire to keep warm by and to cook his supper over. Sunny Boy was lost, and he didn't have any campfire and he didn't like the idea of being soaked by rain.

However, he didn't get wet. The rain continued to spatter gently on the leaves, but the trees were so thick hardly any rain touched the little boy walking under the tangle of leaves and branches, and in a few moments it stopped raining and the pattering noise stopped, too.

By this time it was much darker, and Sunny

Boy began to wonder whether it was bed time. That is, whether it would be his bed time if he had been at home.

"I'll just have to sit down a minute," he said bravely.

Down he sat under an oak tree, and it seemed to him that he was the only live thing in all the woods. The birds were silent, for they had gone to bed long ago. The squirrels and chipmunks were nowhere to be seen. Sunny Boy wondered whether the ants and beetles had gone to bed, and he decided they had—ants couldn't find their way around in the dark, he thought.

"Now I wish I had one of the puppies," he sighed. "A puppy would be company. But I don't believe a puppy could walk as far as I can walk."

Then he happened to remember that he had come this far in search of a bear. Now, no matter how brave a boy may be, he doesn't like to think about bears when he is alone in a dark woods at night. Sunny Boy decided not to

think about the bear, and to keep himself from thinking he pulled out his compass.

He couldn't see it very well, for it was almost dark, but he could tell by feeling it that it wasn't hurt. He had been afraid the water might have injured it, but apparently the handkerchief had kept it dry.

"I'd better go on, I guess," decided Sunny Boy, stuffing the compass and handkerchief back in his pocket.

He talked aloud to himself, and when, a few moments later, he found a trail, he gave a little shout of delight.

"Even if this doesn't go back to Golden Falls," he argued, "it must go somewhere; if it takes me out to the main road, I'll be all right. I can walk home, or someone will let me ride in a car. I can find the way back to Centronia, if I get as far as the public highway."

He marched along in fine spirits. It was dark, to be sure, but it wasn't raining. He had a path to follow and he was almost positive the

path would bring him out on the main road.

"What's that?" said Sunny Boy, stopping short in his march. "Oh, I see—it's only two trees."

He slipped between the trees, tripped over a rock just beyond them, caught himself, but stumbled again over another rock. This time the large stone slipped as his feet touched it and Sunny Boy pitched forward.

He felt himself falling down, down. He landed with a thump in darkness so black that he couldn't see his hand before his face.

"I guess," said Sunny Boy, trying not to cry, "I lost my balance."

CHAPTER IV

SUNNY BOY EXPLORES

SUNNY BOY HORTON hadn't much breath left in him and his tongue hurt because he had bitten the tip end of it when he tumbled. But aside from that, and being rather frightened, he seemed to be all right. Luckily, he had landed on soft earth, instead of on a pile of rocks. If he had fallen on rocks he might easily have broken some of his bones.

"I wonder where this is?" he said aloud.

There was no one to tell him and he didn't have a lantern or a candle to help him make discoveries. But he couldn't stay there in a heap, and as soon as he had his breath and his tongue stopped smarting he set to work to find out, if possible, where he was.

Apparently, he had fallen down a hole, be-

cause he could see one faint star when he looked up. The star was directly over his head and it was a long way off. Sunny Boy, putting out his hands before him so he wouldn't bump into anything, took several steps. He felt something rough and twisted, and then cold, damp earth poured down his arms under the cuffs of his blouse.

"Ugh! Those are tree roots," said Sunny Boy. "I wouldn't like to pull a tree down on top of me."

So he walked away from the tree roots, and this time he bumped into a rock. It was sharp and hard and cold, and Sunny Boy was sure that he had no skin at all left on his nose. But after he had rubbed it a little he felt better, and was ready to try again.

He walked around and around, sometimes walking into more rocks, sometimes catching his coat sleeves on the roots of trees. Some of these roots stuck out straight into the air and one nearly poked Sunny Boy in the eye.

"If that star wasn't so far away, it might be of some help," he complained a little angrily, after he had stubbed his toe for the third time.

He looked up at the star and he thought it winked at him, but just then it went out! A cloud had covered it up, and now Sunny Boy didn't have even a far-away star to shine on him.

He put out his hands and started to walk forward again. It was then that he had another surprise. He kept walking—and walking—and walking. He didn't strike against any tree roots nor come up short against any rocks. He began to wonder what had happened to him when suddenly a great flash of light some distance ahead of him made him close his eyes. A moment later he heard thunder. The rumble sounded over his head and it rolled and echoed and echoed and rolled till Sunny Boy thought the giants must be playing ninepins somewhere close at hand. Harriet always said the giants were playing ninepins when she heard thunder.

Another flash of lightning, then another peal

of thunder, startled Sunny Boy. But this time he felt a strong cold wind blowing directly in his face.

"Gee, that feels good," he admitted, discovering that he was warm and tired.

He stopped every few feet and waved his arms first in front of him, then on each side of him, because he was so afraid he might walk into another rock. He didn't think that his nose would stand much more. It was sore, and Sunny Boy knew that if he walked right smack into a rock and flattened his nose, Harriet wouldn't like it at all. She often said she liked his nose just the way it was.

He wondered why he didn't feel the rain, for with so much thunder and lightning, it must be raining. But not a drop fell on him.

"Oh, there's where the wind comes from! Why, it's outdoors!" cried Sunny Boy, in great surprise.

He understood right away why no rain had touched him, for he stood at the entrance to a

cave and the rain was falling in torrents just outside. Sunny Boy had been walking through a long narrow cave. The hole into which he had fallen was at one end and this was the other end.

Sunny Boy peered out into the rain, but he couldn't see whether he was still in the woods till a great flash of light seemed to split the sky. Then he saw trees tossing and bushes soaking wet and knew he was still in the forest.

Crash! Somewhere in the woods a tree fell, and Sunny Boy shivered a little.

"I'm glad I'm not out there under the trees," he told himself. "That wouldn't be much fun—one might fall on me."

The next moment he gave a cry, for something wet and long and dark and silent had brushed past him on a gallop.

"The—the bear!" gasped Sunny Boy, who, if he had had a tree to climb just then, would have been most thankful.

But, no, it couldn't have been a bear, he

thought, when his first fright was over. It hadn't been as large as a bear. It might have been a fox, trying to get in out of the storm—or a wolf, though Sunny Boy wasn't sure a wolf ever came so near to the city as this, or even lived in this part of the country. He looked over his shoulder hoping he wouldn't see eyes glaring at him. There was nothing he could see except inky black darkness.

A jagged fork of lightning shot straight up into the sky and a great crash of thunder rolled after it. Sunny Boy liked thunder storms, though this was the first one he had ever watched alone.

"There's no use trying to get home when it's so dark," he told himself. "I couldn't find the way and I'd get soaking wet and a tree might fall on me. I guess I'll stay here. I hope my mother isn't worried."

But he knew she must be terribly worried, and his daddy, too, and it worried Sunny Boy that

he couldn't let them know where he was and that he was safe.

He felt in his pocket for his compass. His compass was a great comfort to him and he thought if he could only feel the smooth polished wooden case he would not be so lonely.

The compass wasn't in his pocket!

Sunny Boy sat down and carefully felt all through his handkerchief. No compass. He felt in the pocket where he had kept the handkerchief. No compass. He felt in all his pockets, because he thought he might have been absent-minded and put it in another pocket. But though he found string and buttons, and a pencil, he didn't find the compass.

Then he felt all over the ground, as far as he could stretch his arm. Perhaps, he thought, he had dropped the precious compass on the ground.

"I know I had it, because I looked at it in the woods," he said miserably.

He was determined to find the compass. His

Grandpa Horton had given it to him, and he was the only boy he knew who had a compass. Crawling on his hands and knees and stopping every few inches to feel of the ground before him, Sunny Boy started his search. He meant to crawl all the way to the hole where he had fallen in, but it was farther than he thought and he was very tired. It was warm, too, the longer he crawled, and finally he had to give up.

"Maybe I lost it in the woods," he said sadly. "If I did, I don't suppose I'll ever find it again."

He crawled back to the entrance where the noise of the rain and the distant rumble of thunder still sounded. There was no more lightning, and, my, how inky black it looked!

"As soon as it stops raining I'll go and see if I can find a path," said Sunny Boy, who couldn't have seen a path, or even a wide road, in such darkness, if there had been twenty roads or paths opening out from the cave.

He had no idea what time it was. As a matter of fact, it was hours past his bed time. Pres-

ently Sunny Boy stretched out on the earth floor and despite having no sheets or blankets, not even a pillow, to say nothing of missing his white iron bed, he was sound asleep in less than three minutes.

He woke twice during the night. The first time he had forgotten where he was, and when he heard the drip, drip of water, wondered whether he ought to get up and close the window. His mother didn't like the rain to come in on the rug and the varnished floor.

"Oh! This isn't my bed!" said Sunny Boy, suddenly realizing he wasn't in his own room.

He stared into the darkness, but could see nothing. It was still pouring steadily. He wasn't any too warm, but he was nice and dry, so he turned over and wisely went to sleep again.

The second time he woke it was pale gray outdoors. He intended to get up at once, but it was so early—barely three o'clock—and Sunny Boy was sleepy. He lay looking at the gray sky for a few moments, turned his head and

looked down the long cave, remembering how he had walked through it with his hands stretched out before him, then he went to sleep again.

The next time he woke up, gracious, he knew what was the matter with him at once. He was starving! Last night he had been too anxious about getting home to remember such a thing as supper, but this morning he was so hungry that at first he could think of nothing else.

"Maybe I wouldn't like to have some cereal and milk!" he thought wistfully.

The sun was shining brightly, and Sunny Boy rolled over and sat up. He had the feeling that he couldn't look very neat after such a night, so he stood up and straightened his clothes and pushed his hair back and mopped his face with his handkerchief.

The handkerchief reminded him of his compass and even before he stepped outside the cave to see where he was, he looked carefully on the ground around him. No signs of the compass!

Sunny Boy saw that he stood in a little room almost solidly rock-lined. It was light enough by day for him to see it plainly and also the tunnel-like cave through which he had walked the night before. This was a long narrow passageway, and far at the other end Sunny Boy saw a patch of light which he knew must be the hole into which he had fallen.

"I might have dropped my compass in the tunnel," thought Sunny Boy.

Hungry as he was, he turned around and walked the length of the tunnel, looking on the ground every step of the way. He didn't find the missing compass, nor was it anywhere in the hole, for he looked there, too. Sunny Boy could see this morning how far he had tumbled—a tangle of leaves and torn bushes showed where he had come sliding down on one side. The sides of the hole—it was really a pit—were very steep and it was impossible to think of climbing up them. A patch of blue sky and soft white clouds seemed like a lid on the top.

"Well, I guess I've lost my compass," mourned Sunny Boy.

He went slowly back, and when he reached the other end of the cave he was hungrier than ever. He kept thinking about things to eat, about his blue oatmeal bowl and the silver mug into which Harriet always poured his milk. He remembered the waffles she made for Sunday morning breakfast. He even remembered the bag of apricots Oliver Dunlap had once had and how good they tasted when he passed the fruit to the other boys.

He stepped out of the cave and found himself in the woods.

The trees were dripping, but the birds were having a grand time. They were as glad as Sunny Boy Horton that the rain was over. They were in a way more fortunate than he was, because they knew how to get their own breakfasts.

"I'll just keep going," said Sunny Boy to himself.

He trudged along, stepping out of the way when a bush blocked his path, slipping between trees that grew close together. The grass was wet, but he had worn his sneakers to the picnic and the rubber soles kept his feet dry while the canvas protected his ankles.

He came to a little trail and followed it without much hope. He couldn't fall down any holes in broad daylight—that was one comfort. But he wasn't prepared to have the little trail dip suddenly over a bank and down the other side, and he did almost fall down this bank.

When he had scrambled to the road which it bordered, he stared about him in surprise.

"Why, I know where I am!" he cried.

He was almost in Centronia. He knew this road very well—it led straight into a side street not more than three blocks from Glenn Avenue and his house.

"The cave!" cried the delighted Sunny Boy. "I'll bet nobody knows there is a cave there. It's a real cave and it belongs to me."

He stood a moment puzzling over what had happened. He could see now that he must have taken a short cut through the woods while the main road wound around them to Golden Falls. The cave was much nearer home than the falls.

"I won't tell anybody!" Sunny Boy promised himself. "I'll keep it a secret. Won't the other fellows be 'stonished if they ever do find it out! I could hide in that cave and no one could ever come and get me unless I wanted them to!"

Then he remembered about that oatmeal bowl, and he began to hurry along toward home and breakfast.

CHAPTER V

WHERE'S THE LOST BOY?

MEANWHILE, what about Sunny Boy's daddy and mother and the other folks he had left at the picnic?

Mrs. Horton didn't miss Sunny Boy at first. She had Ruth Baker in her lap, for Gertrude and Evelyn had put their heads in Mrs. Baker's lap and had gone to sleep. But as soon as someone said, "Isn't that thunder?" and another someone pointed out clouds piling up in the sky, the children woke up promptly.

"It won't hurt to begin to get ready to go home," said Mrs. Horton. "We'll pack everything and then, if the storm goes over, we can stay another hour or two. If we see it isn't going to blow over, we can start driving back. We can drive into some barn if it storms too hard."

There was some of the lunch left over, and these boxes, neatly tied, were put into the cars. Sweaters and coats, too, were stowed away. The boys were sent to the brook to wash their hands again. Jimmie Butterworth said that no matter what was happening he was always told to wash his hands.

"This box of sandwiches ought to be eaten up," said Ruth Baker's mother. "They are chopped egg. Here, Nelson, ask the boys to help themselves. Be sure you give Sunny Boy two—he loves chopped egg sandwiches."

"Hey, Sunny Boy! Egg sandwiches!" shouted Nelson.

Perry and Oliver and the other boys came running, but no Sunny Boy answered the call.

"Bet you he's still asleep!" said Oliver Dunlap.

"Sunny Boy hardly ever sleeps," Nelson told him. "Hey, Sunny Boy, hurry up if you want a sandwich!" he screamed again.

No Sunny Boy answered. Perry called and

Jimmie Butterworth, and Ruth Baker shrieked until her mother begged her to stop.

"I want to make Sunny Boy hear me," explained Ruth.

"They'll hear you in the next township," her father answered.

Ruth said Sunny Boy must be farther away than the next township, because he apparently didn't hear her.

"Where is he?" asked Sunny Boy's mother. "Haven't any of you children seen him?"

They all tried hard to think.

"He came out of the brook," Jimmie Butterworth recalled.

"Yes, he did; because I remember he was wondering whether his clothes would be dry enough to put on," said Nelson Baker.

Mrs. Horton glanced toward the bush where Sunny Boy's clothes had been hung after he fell into the water.

"His clothes are gone, so he must have dressed," she said. "I didn't see him after you

put on your bathing suits. Why, where in the world can he have been all that time?"

The thunder growled off toward the east and the clouds piled up higher.

"Perhaps he went back to play in the brook," suggested Mr. Horton. "I'll go down and look around."

Some of the boys followed him and some went with Mr. Baker, who said he'd "scout around" in the woods.

Though they searched for half an hour and though the children called "Sunny Boy! Sunny Boy!" till they were hoarse, no Sunny Boy answered.

"He'll be out in this dreadful storm!" worried Mrs. Horton, trying not to cry. "Oh, just see that lightning!"

A fork of light seemed to jump over a tree top and Ruth Baker burst into tears.

"I don't like thunder!" she sobbed.

Helen Graham didn't like thunder, either, and

Ruth Baker's two girl cousins were afraid they would get their new dresses wet.

"I think we'd better get the boys and girls home," decided Mr. Horton. "I'll stay and look for Sunny Boy. Don't worry, Olive, I'll find him. Why, Sunny Boy can't stay lost—you know that yourself."

Mrs. Horton smiled a little. She remembered that Sunny Boy had been lost before and that he usually turned up safely. But he had never been lost in the woods before, with a thunder storm coming up.

"Oh, oh, how dark it is!" cried Ruth Baker.

No one wanted to go home without searching longer for Sunny Boy, but, as Mr. Horton pointed out, they couldn't do much good if they stayed and got soaking wet. The boys and girls couldn't be expected to do much looking, or they would get lost themselves.

"I'll stay with you," said Mr. Baker.

Mr. Butterworth, Jimmie's father, and Mr. Phelps said they would stay and help Mr. Hor-

ton, too. Mrs. Horton got into the Baker's car, leaving the Horton car for Sunny Boy's father to use. Mrs. Baker could drive and so could Mrs. Phelps. Mrs. Butterworth had come with the Phelps, so she could get home that way, too.

"Don't worry. We'll be home almost as soon as you are, and we'll bring Sunny Boy with us," said Mr. Horton cheerfully, as the procession of cars started back to Centronia.

The children didn't know what to do—it seemed strange to be going home without Sunny Boy. Nelson couldn't finish his egg sandwich, and Ruth Baker said she didn't know what Harriet would say. That made Mrs. Horton cry. Altogether, it wasn't a very gay drive, and the noise of the thunder made them all more anxious. They couldn't help wondering where Sunny Boy was and whether he had a place where he could keep out of the rain.

It didn't begin to rain hard till the cars were on the outskirts of Centronia. If the picnickers

in them had only known about the cave and shouted as they passed that hidden trail that led into the highway, Sunny Boy would very likely have heard them and might have been rescued then and there. Of course no one knew about the cave and Sunny Boy didn't know he was so near to the road, so the automobiles went on toward the city and the rain began to fall in torrents, coming down so hard that those in the cars could hardly see the road.

"Where's Sunny Boy?" asked Harriet, the moment the Baker car drove up to the house.

"Oh, Harriet, he's lost—in all this rain!" poor Mrs. Horton wept.

Harriet helped her out and patted her on the back.

"Now don't you worry, Mrs. Horton," said Harriet. "Sunny Boy may be lost, but he won't stay lost. What you need is a cup of good hot tea, and you'll feel better. There's nothing like a little rest and quiet and a cup of good hot tea after a picnic. I know."

Mrs. Horton drank her tea, and she did feel better. But she couldn't sit still. She walked from window to window, and every time it thundered or the lightning made bright streaks across the sky, she hoped that Sunny Boy, wherever he was, wasn't afraid.

Back at Golden Falls, Sunny Boy's father and the other fathers who stayed with him paid no attention to the growing darkness or to the rain when it came. They scarcely waited for the automobiles to be out of sight before they went down to the pool at the foot of the beautiful little fall to make sure that Sunny Boy had not fallen in there. The water was still clear, not even rippled by the wind, for a group of trees made a wall around it. They could see down to the pebbly bottom and it was quite clear.

"He must be lost somewhere in the woods," said Perry Phelps' father. "I suggest we split up and each take a different direction. If we don't find him within an hour, we're to come back here and meet and decide what to do next."

This plan was adopted, and the four fathers each went in a different direction. They made as much noise as they could, for they thought that perhaps Sunny Boy might have tired himself with walking and lain down somewhere to sleep. They called his name at intervals, too.

At the end of the hour they went back to the tree where they had started, their hunt unsuccessful.

"If anyone lived within a couple of miles, I'd say he had gone to a farmhouse," said Mr. Baker. "But there isn't a house for him to go to."

Spat! The rain struck the leaves around them with a sharp noise.

"He's pretty little to be out in a storm like this," said Mr. Butterworth. "Let's try once more."

He had to shout to make himself heard, for the thunder rolled overhead with a deafening crash. The others nodded to show they understood, and scattered again.

At the end of two hours it was so dark the men agreed there was no use in searching further that night. They climbed into the Horton car, and Sunny Boy's daddy drove them sadly home.

"Is Sunny Boy all right? Did you find him?" the other fathers and mothers and the children began to telephone the Horton house as soon as they learned that the searchers had come back.

When Nelson and Ruth and Oliver and Perry and all the boys and girls Sunny Boy knew heard that he had not been found, they were dismayed and frightened.

"Shan't we ever see Sunny Boy again, Mother?" asked Ruth Baker.

CHAPTER VI

SUNNY BOY'S SECRET

THE next morning Harriet was downstairs extra early. She intended to make strong coffee and cook just the best breakfast she could. She suspected that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Horton had slept much during the night, and she wanted to tempt them to eat by serving a specially nice breakfast. Harriet knew that food was important for worried people, for if they could neither sleep nor eat they might easily make themselves ill.

Harriet put the coffee pot on and went to the front door to see if the baker had left the rolls. As she took in the bag she happened to glance up the street. She rubbed her eyes and almost dropped the paper bag.

Coming down the street, walking hurriedly,

as though he was in haste to reach his destination, was a small figure she knew well.

"Sunny Boy Horton!" gasped Harriet.

She dashed down the steps and seized Sunny Boy in her strong arms. She carried him right up the steps and into the front hall and would have carried him up the front stairs, only Mr. and Mrs. Horton had heard the commotion.

Sunny Boy's mother came running down, his daddy after her, and it really was a wonder Sunny Boy wasn't hugged to jelly, right there on the hall rug.

"Were you frightened by the storm? Are you hungry? What happened to you? Were you lost? How did you get home?" asked his daddy and his mother and Harriet, one right after the other.

Then, instead of waiting for him to answer, they hugged him again.

"I could eat some breakfast," said Sunny Boy cautiously.

His mother whisked him up to the bathroom,

while Harriet hurried to set the table. Sunny Boy was really astonished to see how dirty his face looked in the mirror. He had grimy dirt rubbed into his face and hands and even in his hair. When he told his mother that he had fallen down a hole, she said that accounted for it.

As soon as he had washed and was buttoned into clean clothes, they went down to breakfast. While Sunny Boy enjoyed his oatmeal—in the very same blue bowl he had thought so much about—and the bacon and eggs and the rolls Harriet kept bringing to the table as fast as they disappeared, Sunny Boy told how he had spent the night. He didn't say he had been in a cave, for he rather feared his mother might ask him not to go there again. He explained that he had found "a place in out of the wet" and that he had waited till morning because he couldn't find his way in the dark.

Then Mr. Horton told him how bad everyone at the picnic had felt when they missed Sunny Boy, and how he and Jimmie's and Perry's and

Nelson's fathers had hunted and hunted everywhere for the lost boy.

"I thought I saw a bear," explained Sunny Boy earnestly. "I only meant to see whether it really was a bear, but when I tried to come back, I couldn't find the way."

"The next picnic we go to, I mean to see that every child has a whistle tied around his neck," said Mrs. Horton. "I never want to live through another experience like this. With a whistle, a boy can always let his friends know where he is."

Mr. Horton said he thought that was a good idea, and then he went to telephone the anxious neighbors that Sunny Boy was safe.

Sunny Boy wasn't sleepy, for he had rested better in his cave than either of his parents, who had been unable to sleep because of their anxiety for him. Mr. Horton went off to his office and Mrs. Horton went to her room to try to sleep.

"Don't get lost while I'm resting, Sunny

Boy," she begged, and Sunny Boy kissed her and promised he wouldn't.

He saw Nelson Baker bounding down the back steps of his home next door, and ran out into the back yard to meet him. After Nelson trotted Ruth, and when they saw Sunny Boy they fairly shouted.

"Gee, I'm glad to see you!" cried Nelson. "Did you get wet? What happened to you?"

"I was afraid the lightning had struck you," Ruth said. "Are you all right, Sunny Boy? Did you have any supper?"

Before Sunny Boy could answer, through the side gate hurried Perry Phelps and Jimmie Butterworth.

"Hey, Sunny Boy!" they greeted him. "Where were you? When did you get home? Did you hear it thunder?"

Sunny Boy sat down on the kitchen steps. He felt a trifle bewildered.

"I'm all right," he said.

Around the corner of the house tore Leslie

Bradin and Oliver Dunlap, out of breath and scarlet-faced from running.

"Sunny Boy!" they cried. "What happened to you? Were you lost?"

"Of course he was lost!" declared Ruth Baker scornfully.

"Who found him, then?" said a new voice, and Carleton Marsh joined the group.

"Yes, who found you, Sunny Boy?" Nelson Baker asked curiously.

"I found myself," Sunny Boy informed him. "I waited till morning and then I found the road home."

"Oh-h, where were you when it rained?" asked Oliver Dunlap.

"In a—" Then Sunny Boy remembered and stopped.

"I was under some rocks," he said.

He had almost told the boys about the cave! And while Ruth Baker was there, too! Sunny Boy thanked his lucky stars that he had stopped himself in time. If Ruth ever learned about the

cave, she would insist on going there, and a cave with a girl in it, to Sunny Boy's way of thinking, was no fun at all.

Carleton Marsh sat down on the grass, cross-legged.

"Were you out all night, Sunny Boy?" he asked curiously.

"Yes," answered Sunny Boy. "I didn't stay awake, though," he added hastily. "Most of the time I was asleep."

The boys plied him with questions. They seemed to think that he had been rather selfish in going off to spend the night "under some rocks" without saying a word to them about it. Nelson Baker said he would have liked to sleep outdoors all night, and Leslie Bradin agreed with him.

"Say, I didn't *mean* to get lost," protested Sunny Boy. "It wasn't much fun when it rained, and I fell down a hole and I think a bear or a wolf or a fox—or something—ran past me. And you want to remember I didn't have any supper, either."

The boys hadn't thought of that.

"We ate up the chopped egg sandwiches," Nelson told Sunny Boy. "You weren't there to have any, you know. How did you get lost, anyway, Sunny Boy?"

"I thought I saw a bear," explained Sunny Boy. "I was sure it was a bear, and I went after it a little way. But I didn't find anything and when I tried to come back, the path was gone."

Then, all talking at once, with Ruth's voice loudest of all—for a small girl, Ruth had what her brother Nelson described as a very "tall" voice—the children told Sunny Boy how everyone had called and hunted for him till the thunder storm was so close that Mr. Horton thought the mothers and boys and girls should go on home.

"It rained so hard, you couldn't see the road," Oliver Dunlap reported. "Your father and Mr. Phelps and Mr. Baker and Mr. Butterworth must have been soaked. They didn't come home till after dark."

Oliver and Leslie remembered, after a while, that they were on errands for their mothers and they had to go. They didn't want to go at all, and Harriet said afterward that she hoped their mothers were not in a hurry for anything, for Oliver and Leslie stayed at Sunny Boy's house as long as they possibly could.

Perry Phelps and Jimmie Butterworth stayed, asking questions, till their mothers telephoned them to come home and get ready for lunch. Then Ruth Baker's mother asked her to go to the bakery, and that left Sunny Boy and Nelson Baker alone.

"I found something, Nelson," said Sunny Boy mysteriously.

"What?" Nelson asked eagerly. "In the woods? You—you didn't see Indians, did you, Sunny Boy?"

Now Nelson knew, of course, that there were really no Indians in the woods at Golden Falls. There were no Indians within hundreds of miles of Centronia, as a matter of fact. But Nelson

loved to pretend, and it did seem to him that a boy who had been lost in the woods might have seen something that *looked* like an Indian.

"No-o, I didn't see any Indians," admitted Sunny Boy truthfully. "But I saw—well, I saw a place where Indians lived I guess, maybe a hundred years ago."

"Wigwams!" shouted Nelson, who could be disappointing at times.

Sunny Boy looked at him disgustedly.

"Not wigwams," he corrected. "A cave!"

CHAPTER VII

CAVES ARE MYSTERIOUS

SUNNY BOY had not intended to tell his wonderful secret. He was surprised to find he had given it away. But there was no help for it now.

"A cave!" squealed Nelson. "Where is it? Let's go see it! How big is it, Sunny Boy?"

Sunny Boy looked at him calmly.

"First of all," he announced, "you have to promise not to tell anyone. You mustn't ever tell Ruth. Girls can't go around in caves. And I don't want any of the fellows spoiling it, either."

"We won't spoil it," protested Nelson. "Where is it, Sunny Boy? Can I see it?"

"You haven't promised," Sunny Boy reminded him.

"Of course I won't tell," promised Nelson.

"Well, all right," Sunny Boy said. "I'm going to keep it for a secret, but when I let anyone see it, I'll let you see it."

With that Nelson had to be content. He might have been able to get more details out of Sunny Boy if Ruth hadn't come back from the baker's just then and Nelson's mother called them both in to lunch.

Sunny Boy had to go and have his lunch, too, and in the afternoon his Aunt Bessie came, and she had to hear all about what had happened.

"If you were my son I'd tie a nice little string to you," said Aunt Bessie. "It seems to me that for a boy your age and size, you get mislaid altogether too often. Do you think if you went to the movies with me and we stopped in the drug store for a soda afterward, that I'd be in any danger of losing you on the way there or coming back?"

"Oh, no, Aunt Bessie!" Sunny Boy assured

her earnestly. "I hardly ever get lost. Only now and then."

Aunt Bessie declared that was often enough, and she and Sunny Boy went off to the movies and had a beautiful time. They always had a good time together. There was a cave in one of the pictures, and Sunny Boy almost told Aunt Bessie about the cave he had found. Then he thought that he'd better not tell her, because, like Ruth Baker, she might want to see it, so he said nothing of his own cave. In the picture the cave had a stream of water running through it and the man who lived in it kept his butter in the water in a tin pail. This kept the butter as cold as a refrigerator would.

"I'd like to take some things to eat to my cave," thought Sunny Boy. "I haven't any brook to keep the butter cool, but I could build a fire and cook. I could cook potatoes and—and—apples, I think."

The next day, Sunny Boy went over to Oliver Dunlap's to play. Oliver had a large yard and

a slide and a swing and some gymnastic apparatus. Most of the boys Sunny Boy knew and saw every day were there—Perry Phelps, Jimmie Butterworth and Nelson Baker, among them.

"My cousin's visiting out West," said Oliver, when the boys sat down to rest under one of the trees, after getting out of breath from trying to "chin the bar."

"He sent me a post card yesterday. He saw where the cliff dwellers lived. They lived in caves, not houses the way we do. These caves are in rows and some of them you can't reach unless you go up a ladder."

Nelson looked at Sunny Boy.

"Did all the cliff dwellers live out West?" asked Sunny Boy.

Oliver didn't know.

"Why?" he said.

"Oh, I just wondered," answered Sunny Boy. "I thought perhaps they'd lived in caves around here. Before there were any cities, you know."

"There aren't any caves around here," Oliver argued. "At least, I never saw any."

"Well, there might be some," said Sunny Boy cautiously. "I dare say there are lots of things we haven't seen. Last night a wild animal ran right past me. I didn't exactly see it, but I felt its wet fur. So there must be wild animals in the woods."

"Yes, but not caves," Jimmie Butterworth declared.

"How do you know there aren't any caves?" asked Sunny Boy.

"Because there aren't," Jimmie said firmly.

This was too much for Sunny Boy.

"There are, too!" he announced. "At least there is one cave. I found it. A big one."

The boys all sat up straight and stared at Sunny Boy.

"Where is it?" asked Jimmie suspiciously, looking at Sunny Boy as though he rather thought he might be carrying a cave in his pocket.

"I fell into it," Sunny Boy explained amiably. "Last night when I was lost. I fell down a hole and when I couldn't get out I saw it lighten 'way at the other end. So I walked and walked, and I came out at the other end. It's a big cave."

"Well, where is it?" demanded Oliver Dunlap. "Let's go see it."

Sunny Boy wasn't to be hurried.

"I have to explore it some more myself," he said calmly. "I'll take you there some day, maybe; that is, if you promise not to tell a single, solitary person. If all the fellows in town know it, we can't have any fun; and if one girl knows about the cave, she'll tell all the others and they'll take their dolls and dishes there and play all day."

This dreadful possibility horrified the others. They hurriedly promised not to mention the cave to anyone else and in turn Sunny Boy promised that when he took anyone to the cave he would take all the boys at once.

Two or three days later, Sunny Boy set out on

an exploring expedition of his own. He had the afternoon to himself, for his mother and Aunt Bessie were spending the day downtown shopping and Harriet was busy baking. Sunny Boy Horton, who had been waiting for a few hours when the other boys were not around, thought this his golden chance to see if he could find the cave again.

He went by way of the back streets till he reached the outskirts of Centronia, for if he happened to meet one of his chums, that would mean he'd either have to have company on his expedition or give it up till another time.

Sunny Boy was quite sure he knew exactly where the cave was, so he was rather surprised when the bank bordering the side of the road looked alike as far as he could see. That is, no trail marked the grass, and Sunny Boy had been sure there was a trail.

"Maybe it stops at the top of the bank," he told himself. "I'll walk along the top and see."

It was a fairly steep bank and he had to scram-

ble up, using the bushes to steady himself. He had a package to carry, and this proved so troublesome and he needed both of his hands so much that finally he tied the package to one of his coat buttons with a piece of string.

"You can forget a lot," said Sunny Boy, when he reached the top of the bank.

He had been so sure he remembered walking down this bank and into the road that even when he couldn't find any sign of a path he couldn't believe he was mistaken.

"Well, maybe it was the other side of the road," he admitted at last.

Down he went, crossed the road, and climbed the other bank. He hadn't walked two yards before he found the faint indication of a narrow pathway.

"I came out here," said Suny Boy, addressing a blackbird who didn't seem to be at all interested.

He remembered that the trail had not led all the way to the cave, but he was pretty sure he

knew when to turn off. This time he did remember correctly. He stepped from the path at a point where two slim ash trees grew together; he walked till he came to a large bush, half of it alive and covered with leaves, the other half dead and black. A few feet beyond this, there was the entrance to his cave!

Sunny Boy thought of it as his cave now. He went in and looked around as though he were the landlord and had come to see whether the house needed any repairing. There was a stone ledge, like a shelf, on one side of the cave, and Sunny Boy took his package off his coat button and put it on the shelf. This was his lunch, and Harriet had promised him he'd find two raisin-filled cookies in it, as well as the bread and butter and jam sandwiches.

"I wish I could find my compass," said Sunny Boy aloud.

His voice sounded hollow and the cave looked larger than it had the first time. Sunny Boy

felt as though he were a hundred miles away from everyone.

"Ruth Baker would be scared," he said, and again his voice echoed in the empty cave.

His compass was on his mind, and he had determined to look again for it. Sunny Boy was nothing if not thorough, so he began at the edge of the cave opening and, inch by inch, walked slowly toward the hole at the other end. Not a bit of the cave floor escaped his sharp eyes. But there were corners under jagged rocks and behind stones into which a compass might roll, he thought.

He had a piece of a candle in his pocket and a box of safety matches. These he meant to keep in the cave. All explorers had a box of matches which they kept dry and which they used to light their campfire in the rainy season. Sunny Boy had read about explorers.

"I could use a little of the candle now," thought Sunny Boy, pulling it out of his pocket.

He lit the fat white candle and began to peer

behind stones. When a splash of grease dropped on a rock Sunny Boy stopped and scraped it off with his knife. He liked to scrape candle grease—there is something fascinating about it. Sunny Boy had his pocketknife again, for the Campbell boy had brought it back to him. He told Sunny Boy that he was glad the huckster had brought the puppies back, for he had sold them all for fifty cents apiece.

Sunny Boy was on his knees scraping a splash of candle grease when he heard a low whine. He looked up, startled. The whine sounded again. A little ahead of him a reddish-orange animal with a sharp, sharp nose and two red-rimmed, suspicious eyes, was looking at him.

"A fox!" cried the surprised Sunny Boy.

He wasn't exactly afraid, but he didn't know what foxes did to you. They might be afraid of you, like mice; or they might jump at you, as lions and tigers would; or they might be friendly, like dogs and cats, though Sunny Boy didn't think this at all likely.

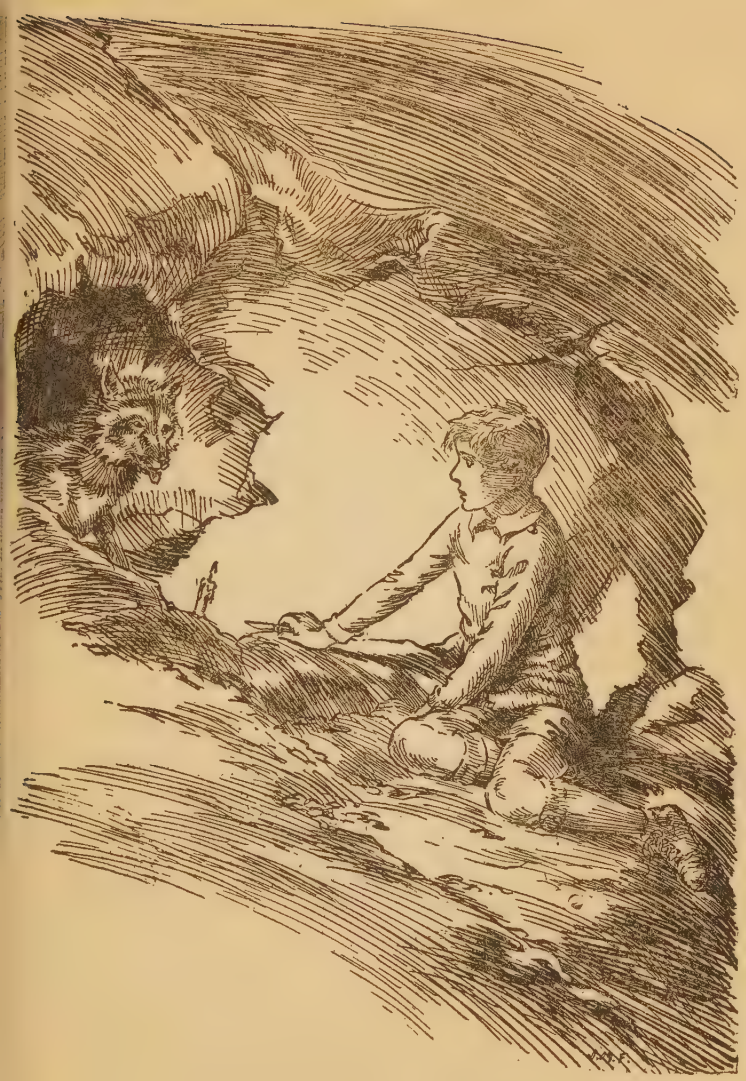
"You get away from here!" he told the fox firmly.

There was a loose heap of small stones close to Sunny Boy and he picked up one of the stones and threw it. It struck the side of the cave, but the noise was enough to send the fox bounding away. He whirled and ran with a beautiful, leaping motion straight for the other end of the cave. Sunny Boy watched him till he disappeared.

"I wonder if he stays in that hole or if he climbs up and goes into the woods," speculated Sunny Boy.

He thought he would find out, and, filling his pockets with stones, in case the fox should decide to come back and see what *he* was doing, Sunny Boy left his candle (first blowing out the flame) and his matches, and began to go through the tunnel part of the cave toward the hole.

It wasn't very light in this part of the cave, but neither was it pitch dark. After a few moments Sunny Boy grew used to the duskiness



"A fox!" cried the surprised Sunny Boy

and he could see fairly well. Of course he couldn't have seen his compass if it had been on the floor of the cave, but he meant to look for that later. He really couldn't hope to put his mind on searching for a lost compass until he knew whether or not the fox intended to come back into the cave.

About half way through the tunnel, Sunny Boy's foot felt something that made a bump. He didn't know what it was—it felt much too large to be his compass—and when he knelt down his hands touched several smooth, hard pieces of something. Sunny Boy couldn't guess what they might be.

He was too curious to go on, so back he went after his precious matches. He figured that he could use one in lighting the candle, though he didn't intend to let that burn many minutes. Candles were hard to get and they had to be made to last.

With his candle in one hand, the match box in the other, Sunny Boy returned to examine his

find. He struck a match, shielded it carefully with his hand and lit the candle. Then he held it close to the ground.

The light flickered an instant, then steadied. Sunny Boy looked and saw—a little heap of smooth white bones!

CHAPTER VIII

AN EXPEDITION FORMS

BONES!" said Sunny Boy.

"Bo-ones!" echoed through the cave.

Now, bones are not the most cheerful objects in this pleasant world, you will agree, unless perhaps they're roast turkey or chicken bones and you've had them left over from your Thanksgiving dinner. Sunny Boy began to think that what he needed was more fresh air and sunshine —in other words, to get out of the cave.

He looked toward the hole at the other end, in the direction the fox had bounded. No matter, let the fox go! Sunny Boy didn't care now whether he found out where the fox lived or not. He meant to go back and let the fox have the cave to himself at least for that day.

Still, he hadn't found his compass. Sunny

Boy looked half-heartedly for another fifteen minutes, but he just couldn't put his mind on the compass. Every time a stone slipped or a twig cracked under his foot, he jumped. The cave was too silent, too dark, too empty.

"I guess it would be more fun with the boys," said Sunny Boy to himself. "If Nelson won't tell Ruth—and he promised he wouldn't—and Jimmie promises not to tell his sister and Leslie Bradin doesn't tell Jessie Smiley, we'll be all right. Girls would spoil everything."

Leslie lived next door to Jessie Smiley, and Jessie had a way of getting information from him. But Sunny Boy was sure that the secret of the cave was one thing Jessie wouldn't find out. Leslie would be too afraid of being kept away from the cave himself to run the risk of telling her.

Sunny Boy left his precious box of matches and his candle on the stone ledge and then saw his lunch. For the first time in his life he had been too interested to eat!

He went out into the sun and sat down on a comfortable rock. Somehow, he didn't want to eat in the cave. From where he sat he could see the entrance to the cave, and it was certainly a fine spot for a campfire. Sunny Boy untied his package—two bread and butter and jam sandwiches, *three* raisin-filled cookies, and, yes, a hard boiled egg, with salt done up in a bit of waxed paper.

Sunny Boy munched away, pretending that he was sitting before a campfire. He was hungry, and so were two large black ants, a robin, and a fat beetle. Sonny Boy fed them all, throwing out a large piece of bread for the robin who ate it thankfully, and crumbs for the ants and the beetle. These last carried their luncheon home—at least, they carried the crumbs away—and Sunny Boy had a good time watching them staggering over sticks and stones with pieces of bread twice as large as themselves.

"I wish I had a drink," he thought, when he had finished eating.

There was no water, and Sunny Boy remembered that his mother didn't like him to drink brook water, anyway.

"We'll have to bring water when the boys come," decided Sunny Boy. "Jimmie Butterworth wants a drink every five minutes."

The more he thought about Jimmie Butterworth wanting a drink of water, the thirstier Sunny Boy become. He wondered if he could dig a well. He rather liked the idea of showing the other boys a well he had dug himself. Besides well water would be clear and cold and clean and his mother would surely say it was all right to drink.

"I could at least start a well," said Sunny Boy to himself.

He had been sitting still for at least fifteen minutes and if Sunny Boy Horton sat still for fifteen minutes he felt so energetic that he just had to rise up and do something important.

He had never dug a well and, as it happened, he had never seen anyone else dig one; he had

no idea how far in the earth one had to go before water was found. But by this time he was not anxious to dig a well and surprise Jimmie Butterworth and hear what Nelson Baker would say when he saw it.

Sunny Boy remembered the wells he had seen as he and his daddy and mother drove through the country. There had been a well, too, on his grandpa's farm. Sunny Boy remembered that all the wells he had seen had looked alike. What make them look alike? Why the stone wall built around them, of course!

"There aren't so many stones around here, but I guess I can get enough to build a wall," said Sunny Boy to a large black ant that paid not the slightest attention to him.

He found a sharp-pointed stone which was exactly what he wanted. The first thing to do, reasoned Sunny Boy, was to mark out a large circle which should be just as large around as his well was to be. He cleared a nice, clean spot on the ground, picked off all the weeds and sticks

and bits of stone and smoothed it carefully with his feet. Then, using the sharp point of the stone as a pencil, he drew the best circle he could. If you're used to drawing circles, you know how difficult it is to make them perfectly round. They will bulge on one side and it must be confessed that Sunny Boy had the same trouble with his circle. It looked, when he had it drawn, like a circle with the toothache. Still, he thought it would answer for a well, and he began to collect stones to make the wall.

This was really a rocky country and though there were stones scattered about, the difficulty was that they were all large. Sunny Boy could have broken boulders into small bits if he had had a chisel and a hammer; but then, if he had had a shovel, he might have been able to dig a deep well. He knew he would have to do the best he could and he worked busily and good-temperedly to find smaller rocks and stones that would, laid together and on top of each other, make a wall.

He wished he had some cement, to make the

stones stick, but even without cement the pile grew higher and higher. Sunny Boy remembered that the wall around the well on his grandpa's farm, came almost up to his chin. He wanted his wall to be just as high, but when it was about up to his knees he had used up all the small stones he could find. Besides, the wall kept slipping out of place—that, of course, was because there was no cement.

"Well, I'd better begin to dig, I think," said Sunny Boy. "My pointed stone will do for a shovel, even if I can't dig the whole well this afternoon."

By the time he had scrambled over his circle of stones—and had knocked a third of the wall down in scrambling—and had tried to dig inside that circle—where there wasn't enough room for his elbows, let alone his feet—Sunny Boy had about decided that perhaps people dug their wells before they built the walls around them. He dug for what seemed to him a long time, but there was no sign of water and, worst of all, the

hole in the ground wasn't very deep. Sunny Boy put his hand down—the earth wasn't even damp!

He scooped up another bit of earth and a great, fat angle worm crawled lazily out of the dirt and humped himself along the edge of the stone.

"We couldn't drink the water if I found it," sighed Sunny Boy. "My mother never would let us drink water here if I told her an angle worm came out of the well. I'll pull out some of the stones so he'll have a doorway and then I guess I'll go home. This wouldn't be a good drinking well, so I won't finish digging it."

Very carefully, he made a hole in the stone wall he had built, by pulling out some of the bottom stones. When he had made a "doorway" large enough for the worm, Sunny Boy felt satisfied. He wouldn't want to feel that he had shut a worm up inside his wall and that the poor creature might have to live there forever and ever.

He had brought a ball of red string with him, and now he busied himself marking the trail as he went home. He knew the way by this time, he was sure, but there was a possibility that he would forget, or not be able to find the path the first time, and he wanted to lead the boys right to the mouth of the cave. So he tied knots of red string at intervals of ten yards or less, and in that way marked his route perfectly. There was no danger that anyone else would find the way, for, except in the hunting season, hardly anyone ever went through this part of the woods. The brush was thick, while near the picnic grounds it had been thinned out and paths made.

Sunny Boy found Nelson Baker sitting disconsolately on his own steps when he reached home an hour later.

"Hello!" said Nelson. "Harriet told me you'd gone off somewhere. Did you eat all the cookies?"

"Well, yes," Sunny Boy felt apologetic. "I'll see if Harriet has any left over, though."

"Oh, she gave me two," said Nelson. "I just thought you might have one you didn't eat. Harriet makes dandy cookies."

Sunny Boy agreed, but he had more important things to talk about than cookies.

"Where are the other fellows, Nelson?" he asked.

"Oh, Jimmie's got to stay in his yard because he broke a window this morning," said Nelson. "Perry and Oliver are around somewhere—I guess they went with Carleton Marsh to see his new rabbits."

Sunny Boy made up his mind swiftly. If Jimmie Butterworth couldn't come out, they would go and see him.

"Let's go round by Carleton's and see if the boys are there," suggested Sunny Boy. "Then we can go over to Jimmie's. I want to tell you something."

Nelson bounced to his feet.

"Is it about the cave?" he asked in a loud

whisper. "Is it, Sunny Boy? Is that where you've been—up to the cave?"

Sunny Boy nodded mysteriously.

"But I can't tell you till we get all the others together," he said.

"You could tell me first," Nelson declared.

"Well, I will, if we don't find the others," promised Sunny Boy.

He had to run into the house to find out what time it was. Harriet told him it was four o'clock and gave him two cookies, one for himself and one for Nelson.

"We have a whole hour," reported Sunny Boy, handing over the cookie to the grateful Nelson. "I have to come home at five."

Carleton Marsh lived almost around the corner, but on another street. The boys were still in his yard, looking at the pretty white and black rabbits.

"What are you eating?" said Carleton. "Where have you been? Look, Sunny Boy, this

will be a trick rabbit when it grows up—you can tell by the ears."

The ears looked like any other rabbit's ears to Sunny Boy, but he admired them politely.

"I just ate a cookie, but it's all gone," he told Carleton. "Let's go to see Jimmie Butterworth —he has to stay in his yard."

The other boys, who had begun to tire of the rabbits, hailed this suggestion with delight. As for Jimmie, when he saw them, he was so pleased it was easy to see that his own yard bored him when he had no one to help him enjoy it.

"Sunny Boy's going to tell us something," said Nelson, who was just about bursting with curiosity.

There was a horse chestnut tree in the Butterworth yard and the boys sat down under that. They looked expectantly at Sunny Boy.

"I know where there's a cave," said Sunny Boy.

Six pairs of eyes—for Leslie Bradin had been

with the other boys, though Nelson had not counted him—stared respectfully.

"It's a secret cave, and no one else knows where it is," went on Sunny Boy.

"Do you know where it is?" asked Jimmie.

That was, as Nelson promptly told him, a rather foolish question. Of course Sunny Boy knew where the cave was. Hadn't he just said so?

"Where is it?" asked the practical Oliver Dunlap.

"It's in the woods," Sunny Boy explained patiently. "I found it the time I was lost. It's a big cave with a hole at one end; that's where I fell down. Then there's a long tunnel, and it comes out in the real cave. Then there's woods, and you walk a little way and there's the road."

Leslie Bradin wanted to know how far away it was.

"It's near!" cried Sunny Boy. "I was surprised to see how near home it is when I came

out on the road. You can get there, easy, in half an hour."

Nelson half started up as though he meant to go right away.

"Can you find it again?" asked Perry Phelps anxiously.

"He was there this afternoon!" shouted Nelson. "Come on, let's go now. I want to see the cave."

Jimmie Butterworth was, of course, too old to cry. But he looked as though he might cry in another moment. Sunny Boy remembered that Nelson had said Jimmie couldn't leave the yard that afternoon.

"It's too late to go this afternoon," announced Sunny Boy firmly. "We can go to-morrow. But you'll all have to promise, cross-your-hearts, that you won't tell *anybody*. This is a secret cave."

The boys promised solemnly not to tell. Then, in case they might forget, Sunny Boy impressed it on them that they mustn't tell even

their sisters. Girls, he said, would just ruin a cave. To this the other boys agreed.

"Besides, if people know where the cave is, they'll go and use it, likely as not," said Sunny Boy. "You know how folks are—they'll camp out in our cave and then where shall we be?"

It was almost five o'clock before the plans for the next day were all made. It was Sunny Boy's suggestion that they go early in the morning and take their lunches.

"And you'll have to take bottles of water," he warned them. "Everybody will have to take a bottle of water. Jimmie had better take two bottles. There's no water to drink up there, and it makes you awfully thirsty to walk and jump around."

When Harriet heard that night that Sunny Boy was going off again in the morning and "could use" a little lunch—that was his own expression: "I could use a little lunch, Harriet," he said—she declared that she didn't know what he was up to.

"Oh, all boys are like that, Harriet," Sunny Boy's daddy assured her. "They have to go off and play by themselves and they just have to have something to eat. If I had had your raisin-filled cookies when I was Sunny Boy's age, I might have grown up to be a wise and famous man."

Mrs. Horton said he was making up for lost time rapidly, and that made them all laugh. Mr. Horton and Sunny Boy were at that moment devouring a plate of the cookies between them.

Harriet put up a neat little lunch for Sunny Boy before breakfast the next morning, and his mother gave him a large clear glass bottle with a cork in it, which he could fill with water. He was ready by quarter of nine and set off alone, trying not to walk importantly.

This had been decided the afternoon before—that each boy was to start off from his own home alone and then they would meet at the white birch tree on the left hand side of the road just over the Centronia line.

"If we meet at my house, or anyone's house," Sunny Boy had said, "and all go off together, someone will be sure to say, 'I wonder where those boys are going!' "

"Yes, and my sister would say, 'I'll go with you—wait a minute!' " Nelson Baker had added.

If anyone had been watching this morning, he might have been more mystified to see seven boys, each with a package under his arm and a bottle of water in one hand, stepping briskly along the quiet streets. However, no one was watching, and Sunny Boy and Nelson met at the white birch tree at almost the same instant that Leslie Bradin and Oliver Dunlap came hurrying up.

In another second, Carleton Marsh and Jimmie Butterworth joined the group, and they waited—not very patiently it is true—till Perry Phelps came.

"I couldn't find a bottle," explained Perry, who was out of breath. "I had to borrow my father's thermos. Is that all right?"

Sunny Boy assured him it was, except that he would have to bring it back.

"We can leave our bottles, if we don't want to bother to bring them home," he said.

"Oh, well, I'll bring this back," Perry answered carelessly. "I suppose my father might want to use it."

Sunny Boy led the way, of course. He could see the little knots of red string, but the boys were too busy asking him questions to notice anything. When Sunny Boy told them about the bones they were surprised, but they rather liked the idea of bones in a cave.

"Pirates, of course," said Leslie comfortably.

Sunny Boy laughed at that.

"These are little bones," he said, parting a bush to crawl through and holding it open for the others to crawl after him.

"Gee, what a dandy cave!" cried Nelson, staring straight ahead.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAVE BOYS' CLUB

THE boys stared at the cave for a moment or two without attempting to go near it. They were all impressed by the size of the opening.

"I thought it was a little place!" exclaimed Jimmie Butterworth. "Some caves, you know, you have to crawl in on your hands and knees."

"This is a peach of a cave!" declared Perry Phelps. "I wish we could live in it. We could hunt game in the woods and get enough to eat, I guess."

"What kind of game?" asked Jimmie scornfully. "Squirrels? I wouldn't want to live on squirrels, thank you."

"Well, come on, see the cave," suggested Sunny Boy. "You'd better leave your lunch

and the water bottles in one place. Out of the sun."

The boys put their things down just inside the cave. Perhaps they expected to see a fox, for they stared around the cave half fearfully at first. But there was no fox in sight this morning, and if one had been watching, it is quite likely that it would have given seven boys a wide berth.

Sunny Boy showed them his candle and matches, but, he explained, they couldn't light a candle "all the time."

"We have to make it last," he said. "I'll guess I'll light it though, to show you the bones."

He took the candle and the matches and began to walk toward the back of the cave, the other boys following. Now, Sunny Boy had a very good sense of distances and he remembered just about how far he had walked the day before. He stopped when he thought he had gone far enough, lighted the candle, and there, a few feet ahead of him, were the small white bones.

"It's a chicken!" said Perry Phelps. "See, here's a feather. It was a Plymouth Rock chicken—they have mixed black and white feathers like this."

Leslie was rather disappointed to be told these were not pirates' bones, but he suggested that perhaps the pirates had had roast chicken for their dinner.

"It was the fox!" said Sunny Boy, for he had told the boys about the fox the day before. "They eat chickens. My grandpa told me so."

Somehow, the bones didn't bother Sunny Boy to-day—perhaps because he had so much company with him. He wanted to see the other end of the cave; so he blew out the candle and continued to walk steadily toward the light, which he knew was the hole, and his playmates trotted trustfully after him.

"Say, this *is* a big cave!" cried Jimmie Butterworth, in admiration. "We could all live here! We could spread blankets on the floor and

have a fire, and when the enemy surrounded us at one end, we'd run out the other."

But when they reached the other end of the cave, Sunny Boy pointed out a slight flaw in Jimmie's brilliant plans.

"We couldn't run out this end," said Sunny Boy. "And the enemy could come through the other way and capture us all."

This was true. The boys had to admit it as they stared around the hole, into which Sunny Boy had tumbled that picnic afternoon. It was deep, like a well, and one side was jagged rocks, with not a single good place for a foothold. The other three sides were a tangle of weeds, saplings, and fearfully sharp briars. When Leslie took hold of a branch and tried to swing himself up, a shower of gravel and stones began to pour down.

"Quit that!" ordered Sunny Boy. "You'll knock a rock down on us if you aren't careful."

Nelson wanted to know which side Sunny

Boy had fallen down, but Sunny Boy didn't know.

"It was dark," he reminded Nelson. "I did scratch my face and hands, so perhaps I fell through the bushes. Anyway, I couldn't get out, and that was no fun."

They trooped back to the front of the cave and Jimmie insisted he must have a drink of water. He drank more than half of the water in his bottle, and Sunny Boy, to keep him from drinking the rest and then suffering from thirst the rest of the day, announced that he had a plan.

"Let's have a club," he suggested. "We could call it—we could call it—the Cave Boys' Club!"

"Good for you, Sunny Boy Horton!" Nelson cried. "That's a dandy name for a club!"

The other boys beamed upon Sunny Boy. They liked the idea, too.

"We can make it a secret organ—organization," said Sunny Boy, sputtering a little over

the long word. "And we can hold our meetings right here. Very few people have a cave for their club—at least, I don't think many people do," he added.

The more they talked this over, the better the boys liked the plan. They thought the Cave Boys' Club was an ideal name and they made Sunny Boy president at once. Nelson Baker was chosen for the vice president and Perry Phelps was secretary. Though Jimmie Butterworth protested, he had to be treasurer.

"I can't count," said Jimmie. "How can I be treasurer when I can't add up the dues?"

"We'll add them up for you," promised Leslie Bradin.

"Wait till we have some money before you begin to worry," Sunny Boy advised him wisely.

By this time they were hungry, and perhaps a lunch had never tasted so good as this one they ate in the mouth of their own cave, with all the rest of the world shut out by a screen of bushes and trees. They fed a squirrel this time, in ad-

dition to a robin, three ants and two beetles. Sunny Boy thought these must be his old friends and they had returned and brought their relatives with them.

"When we have regular meetings, we can cook our supper," he said, watching an ant carry away a raisin.

"What can we do for fun?" asked Jimmie, drinking the last swallow of water in his bottle.

"Well, we'll have to have initiations," said Sunny Boy seriously. "I think every club has initiations. We'd better do that right away. All the fellows who aren't officers have to be 'nitiated."

The members of the new club looked a bit uncertain.

"Yes, that's so," agreed Nelson. "Sunny Boy and Perry and Jimmie and I will fix it all up. When shall we have the first meeting, Sunny Boy?"

Sunny Boy knew these friends of his very well. He knew that they tired of anything they

had too much of very quickly. The way to make the Cave Club a success, Sunny Boy decided, was to make them wait a little while between meetings.

"One week from to-day," he said firmly, and he wouldn't change that, even though Nelson said it was too long to wait, and Leslie declared he might be visiting his aunt then, and Oliver was sure he'd forget he belonged to the club.

"No, you won't forget," said Sunny Boy to Oliver. "I'll come and remind you."

Sunny Boy had never seen anyone initiated into a club, but he had no doubt he would be able to plan a program. The rest of the afternoon, while the boys explored the cave more thoroughly and played "Indians and Settlers" through the woods, Sunny Boy thought now and then about the initiations.

"We must have music," he told himself.

The game of "Indians and Settlers" was one that Sunny Boy had invented. He and his friends had often played it, but they agreed that

this was the best place they had ever had to play it in. There were trees and a cave and no houses to be seen anywhere. Indians had lived in the cave once, Sunny Boy was sure. And when Perry Phelps protested that the settlers had lived in houses and there were no houses for them now, Sunny Boy knew how to settle that argument.

"They can be going to town," said he. "Settlers always had to go to town. And the Indians will attack them as they go through the woods. That's the way it often happened."

All the boys were eager to be Indians and lurk in the cave. Jimmie Butterworth declared he had always wanted to lurk in a cave.

"We'll have to take turns," declared Sunny Boy, who was used to deciding disputes. "Leslie and Nelson and Perry and Carleton can be Indians first: they can scalp the settlers (if they can) then Oliver and Jimmie and I will be the Indans."

The four Indians retired to the cave where

they gave war-whoops—at least they said they were war-whoops—at intervals until Sunny Boy whistled three times. That was the signal that the settlers had started and it was up to the Indians to try to encounter them as they made their way through the woods. The trees were close together in some places and in others thinly placed, so that sometimes a boy could go from one tree to another without being seen; other places he would have to dash boldly into the open to get from one tree to another.

"Don't let them see you," Sunny Boy cautioned his settlers, as the Indians ran from the cave and stood looking about hopefully. "Don't move before they do; they can see the bushes rustling, when they're standing still, but as soon as they begin to run they won't be able to notice the leaves."

This was really very clever of Sunny Boy to have noticed. When the other lads were tearing through the woods they wouldn't be apt to see a bush moving its branches and leaves; but if they

were standing still and quite suddenly a bush or a young sapling began to wiggle frantically, it would be a dull Indian indeed who didn't observe and wonder and go to see what all the fuss was about. Sunny Boy had been an Indian himself many times in this game and he remembered what he had learned.

So the boys who were settlers waited, silent and motionless, until they saw Perry dash off in one direction and Carleton in another.

"Quick!" whispered Sunny Boy. "Run about three trees ahead. Don't go further than that. They might see us. Stop and *stay* stopped."

Oliver and Jimmie obeyed. Crouching down they ran past two trees and stopped behind the third. Sunny Boy followed them. The game was to get back to the cave before they were detected; the boy or boys who did that would be Indians the next time. Sunny Boy had promised that they might be in any case, but of course it is always more fun to win any game.

Perry passed so close to Sunny Boy that he

might have touched him. Carleton Marsh dropped on his hands and knees and began to go through the underbrush, sure that in this way he would uncover any settler who might be hiding. He would, too, provided the settler stayed in one place long enough. Sunny Boy had no intention of staying too long in one place.

"Now run again—quick!" he instructed his allies. "Run for the cave! But remember, if they see you, you're lost. And if they touch you, you're scalped!"

Jimmie shut his eyes when he ran. This is no way to run and for a settler it is particularly bad. Jimmie, we regret to say, ran directly into the arms of Perry Phelps, who hugged him joyfully and announced he was scalped. Perry made so much fuss over his capture that Sunny Boy and Oliver managed to reach the cave without being seen.

They were entitled to be Indians because they had won, and Jimmie, according to rules, should have been a settler a second time. But the boys

knew they didn't have long to play and they were eager for Jimmie to do his lurking in the cave, since he wanted to so much. They played two more games of Indian and Settler and Sunny Boy wasn't captured nor scalped once.

It was time to go home before he remembered his compass. He told Nelson about it, and Nelson at once suggested he and the other boys should hunt for it.

"We'll look all through the woods and in the cave, too, Sunny Boy," said Nelson earnestly. "If you're sure you had it after you left the picnic grounds, I'll bet we can find it for you."

Sunny Boy, of course, remembered looking at his compass, wrapped in his handkerchief, after he had been lost. But though the boys looked till there was danger they would all be late for their suppers, they couldn't find Sunny Boy's lost treasure.

"Well, we'll hunt again next time," said Leslie, when Sunny Boy urged them to stop.

"All right. But come on now," Sunny Boy

commanded. "We can't be late for supper, and that's all there is to it. First thing you know some boy's mother will say he can't go out of the yard if he can't get home on time."

It looked for a few minutes as though several mothers might say that very thing. For Perry Phelps was half way home before he remembered he had left his thermos bottle, and he was afraid —or at least he said he didn't like—to go back to the cave after it alone. Sunny Boy went back with him and the others waited, and then they had to run every step the rest of the way. But they reached home a few moments after five, and that was all right.

Though there couldn't be a meeting of the Cave Boys' Club for a week, Sunny Boy, Nelson, Perry, and Jimmie, of course had to get together frequently to make their plans.

"It's very important to initiate members into a club just *right*," Sunny Boy explained to his brother officers.

He also said it was very important that no one should hear of their plans.

"The members have to be surprised," said Sunny Boy.

So anxious was he to keep the program a secret, that he wrote down everything and passed it to the other boys to read. They agreed to everything he suggested, but it cannot be said that they were much help when it came to planning. Jimmie was more anxious about the "refreshments" than anything else, and Perry said they ought to have had the dues collected at the first meeting.

"We could buy blankets and things," explained Perry.

Sunny Boy went right on planning. He asked Harriet how much blankets were and she told him. Right away Sunny Boy saw that the club would have to get along without such luxuries; they couldn't buy one blanket, let alone seven.

"But we're going to have music and every-

thing at this meeting," said Sunny Boy happily to himself. "I think maybe this will be the best initiation a club ever had."

It does sometimes seem as though a week might be a year, and the days between the first club meeting and the second seemed to fairly crawl. But at last it was the night before the big day, and seven boys in Centronia went to bed that night, looked at the shining stars the last thing, and said to themselves, "Well, I guess it will be a good day for the 'nitiation to-morrow."

Sunny Boy Horton added sleepily: "I hope I don't forget anything."

CHAPTER X

INITIATION TESTS

UP with the sun—that was Sunny Boy Horton the next morning. He felt the way he did Christmas morning, all excited inside and eager to get dressed and downstairs.

Out in the yard he had a box packed with the things he would need for the meeting. He and Nelson had decided that they would have to borrow an express wagon to take the box in, and luckily Jimmie Butterworth had one. Sunny Boy's house had an attic and there were old trunks up there. He was allowed to take anything from the trunks that were not locked, and he had spent several busy afternoons up there, making his selections and carrying mysterious bundles down to put in the box under the cellar steps.

"I don't know what those boys are up to or where they go," said Harriet, who couldn't help noticing that more boys than usual were confabing with Sunny Boy, "but they seem to keep out of mischief. And how they do eat! I'm always putting up lunches for 'em."

Harriet had a box of lunch ready for Sunny Boy this morning. He could always depend on her to make sandwiches for him, and though she pretended to grumble, she really enjoyed baking cookies.

"I won't be home for lunch, Mother," said Sunny Boy at the breakfast table. "We have something awfully important to do."

Mrs. Horton said it was a very nice day to do something important and Sunny Boy's daddy said he had a good mind to stay at home and play with him.

"Why should I go to the office and work all day and never have any fun?" asked Mr. Horton.

"Oh, Daddy, you couldn't play this," Sunny

Boy said in some alarm. "It's a secret and only seven boys know it."

Mr. Horton said in that case he supposed he might as well go to business, and he kissed Mrs. Horton and Sunny Boy and hurried away as usual.

As soon as he had finished breakfast, Sunny Boy went out in the yard to see if Nelson was ready. He and Nelson always had difficulty getting away without Ruth asking them where they were going and offering to go with them.

"Hey, Sunny Boy," cried Nelson, as soon as Sunny Boy poked his bright head outside the door. "Hey, we'll have to wait a little while. Mother has to go to the dentist and I have to stay with Ruth till she comes back. Mother says she'll 'muse Ruth the rest of the day after that."

Of course there was nothing to do but wait. Ruth came out in the yard and they started to play three-cornered ball with a soft rubber ball. Sunny Boy was afraid Ruth would discover the box on the cellar steps, Nelson was afraid his

mother would stay longer than an hour, and both were afraid the other boys would come around to see what the matter was.

"When are you going to take me to see the toys down town?" demanded Ruth. "You said you would, Nelson. Take me to-day?"

"No," said Nelson uneasily. "I couldn't. Not to-day."

"To-morrow?" Ruth bounced her ball three times and then threw it at Sunny Boy who wasn't expecting it and let it roll down the side alleyway.

He had to run after it. It rolled, as balls will, across the front pavement and into the gutter. As he fished it out, he heard someone tapping on the window pane of the house next door.

"Will you run up to the corner and mail this letter for me?" asked the old lady who had moved into the house next door a few weeks before. "I have a cold and I don't like to go out and I want

my daughter, Jane, to get this letter the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Where's my ball, Sunny Boy?" cried Ruth loudly.

She had come out to the front pavement and was looking at Sunny Boy.

"Yes'm, I have it right here," said Sunny Boy, slightly confused by so many demands at once.

"No you haven't—I haven't given you the letter yet," contradicted the old lady. "It's right here in my hand. I do hope you're a reliable boy," she added anxiously.

"Where's my ball?" repeated Ruth.

Sunny Boy said nothing—he thought that might be safer.

"Are you reliable?" the old lady prodded him.

She wore a white shawl around her shoulders and her face was very wrinkled. Sunny Boy had never seen her to speak to before, though his mother had gone in to see her and take her a bowl of hot soup the first day she moved into the

house. Hot soup, when you are moving, is very nice to have given you and the old lady had been pleased.

"Did you lose my ball?" Ruth was insisting. Ruth never gave up.

Sunny Boy thought he'd better settle Ruth first.

"Yes, I have your ball. I haven't lost it. It's in my pocket," he said, as politely as he could.

"Dear me, I think you should have more patience with your little sister," the old lady declared. "I like to see boys always patient and courteous."

"She isn't my sister," explained Sunny Boy.

"Well, I'll have to trust you, after all," said the old lady, paying no attention to this. "I'll have to trust you, because there is no one else to send. I'm running a risk, but I hope you're reliable."

She stopped and looked at Sunny Boy so intently he thought he ought to say something. So he said, "Yes'm."

"I haven't a postage stamp to put on Jane's letter," the old lady informed him. "I'll have to give you the money and let you get it—I understand they sell stamps at the drug store. Stay, I'll tell you what you'd better do—take this two cents and go to the drug store and get me the stamp. Then come back here and I'll paste it on and you can mail the letter in the box at the corner. Yes, that will be better. Here are two pennies. Don't lose them. And mind you don't spend them for candy."

Sunny Boy was so dazed he was half way to the drug store before he realized that evidently the old lady didn't think he could be trusted with two cents! She thought he might throw away her letter and spend the two pennies for candy! The more he thought about it, the more astonished Sunny Boy was. Why, he had an allowance of his own—ten cents a week. He didn't need to steal two pennies to buy candy!

"Where's my ball?" chanted Ruth behind him. "Where's my ball?"

Sunny Boy bought the stamp and ran all the way back to the house. He waited impatiently while the old lady put it on her letter and gave it to him with many instructions not to lose it before he reached the mail box. Then Sunny Boy ran to the corner mail box and dropped it in and then and not until then did he give Ruth her ball.

"I just can't stand two women talking to me at once," he explained seriously to her. "You have to let me listen to one at a time."

"Where have you been?" Nelson asked them placidly when they returned to the back yard. Nelson had been reading on the steps. "Say, Sunny Boy, the boys will be around after us, if we don't get away pretty soon."

Oliver Dunlap did come, after they had been playing ball half an hour.

"Ps-st!" he whispered loudly.

"What are you acting so funny for, Oliver Dunlap?" demanded Ruth.

"Ps-st! Where's the you know what?" Oliver

whispered more loudly. He was determined to keep the secret. "Why don't you come you know where?" he asked.

Ruth jumped up and down, her curiosity "eating her up," as Nelson said.

"What does he mean, Nelson?" she demanded. "What's he saying? Where is what?"

Oliver waved his hands and made a terrible face—this to warn Sunny Boy and Nelson not to tell.

"You'd better go away," said Sunny Boy, laughing in spite of himself. "You only give the thing away. Nelson and I are coming as soon as Mrs. Baker gets home from the dentist's."

"Ps-st! O.K. Beeswax!" whispered Oliver hoarsely, and disappeared.

"What does 'beeswax' mean?" Ruth asked quickly.

"I don't know," said Sunny Boy, relieved that he could answer that so easily. "I never heard it before. I guess Oliver is making believe."

The truth was that Oliver was determined to

have a mystery, if he had to make one himself! He explained later to Sunny Boy that he thought "beeswax" was a good password and he had used it.

Ruth wouldn't play ball any more. She sat down on the steps and drove Sunny Boy and her brother wild by asking questions. She was so quick and so persistent that both boys were afraid she would find out about the Cave Boys' Club before they realized they were telling her. So when Mrs. Baker came home from the dentist's and called Ruth to the house, Sunny Boy and Nelson lost no time in getting their precious box out of the cellar, taking their lunches, and scooting for Jimmie Butterworth's, where they were to get the wagon and meet the other boys.

"We can fill our water bottles at Jimmie's house, too," planned Sunny Boy.

This carrying water to the cave was really a nuisance, but as Sunny Boy pointed out, it would be worse to be there and get thirsty and have no water to drink.

They found the other lads waiting for them impatiently. Oliver had reported that they were coming "by and by." Five boys and their lunches and the red and yellow express wagon were drawn up on the Butterworth side lawn. Sunny Boy frowned a little when he saw them.

"Folks will see you," he told them. "You look as if you were going somewhere. You can't keep it a secret cave if people see us going there."

"Well, we won't all start at once," said Jimmie comfortably. "I'll go with Carleton the back way; he has to help me carry my skin."

"Your what?" asked Sunny Boy.

"My skin," said Jimmie proudly. "I read about it in a book. You put water in a skin and it keeps cool and you can carry more than you can in a bottle. Indians did it."

He had a black and white calf's skin he had begged from the butcher and he had sewed it up himself into a square-shaped bag. This he filled at the kitchen sink and then he and Carle-

ton took an end each, and started walking—briskly. The reason for that Sunny Boy soon discovered.

But first he had to fill his own two water bottles and the other boys had to fill theirs, good-natured Mrs. Butterworth never asking a single question nor even remonstrating when she saw them spattering her kitchen floor.

"Clean water won't hurt anything," she said, when Sunny Boy tried to sweep up the spatters with a broom. "Run along and have a good time. I like to see you boys playing outdoors."

The box that Sunny Boy and Nelson had packed occupied the greater part of the wagon. There was room for the bottles of water and some of the lunches, and when the wagon was loaded it was so heavy that the boys had to take turns pulling it in pairs.

"We'll go the back way, and perhaps no one will see us," said Sunny Boy, who didn't approve of the parade. It looked, he argued, exactly as though they were "going somewhere."

As soon as they were well started, they saw the reason why Jimmie Butterworth and Carleton Marsh had hurried off with the skin of water. It leaked! All along the pavement of Quitman Street was a trail of water and here and there a little puddle. When they caught up with the two boys there was hardly any water left in the skin.

"I don't see why," said Jimmie sadly. "If Indians carried water in skins, why can't we?"

"Well, I think," Sunny Boy answered mildly, "the Indians did something to their skins that made them waterproof. Perhaps you didn't sew yours up right, either."

Jimmie was so disgusted with the failure of the calf's skin to hold water that he wanted to toss it away into a vacant lot. But Sunny Boy said it would make a dandy rug for the floor of their cave, and he asked Jimmie to bring it along. This cheered up Jimmie, and before they reached the cave he had persuaded himself that he had

asked the butcher to give him the skin so he could use it for a rug on the cave floor.

"That's a mighty handsome black and white calfskin," Jimmie said at intervals. "I guess you can trust me to fix up a cave so that it looks like something."

Jimmie was so busy patting himself on the back that he couldn't give much help to lifting the express wagon over stones and hauling it up the steep bank to the path that would take them to the cave. But the other boys pitched in willingly and tugged and pulled and shoved till they had brought the wagon safely to the entrance of the cave.

Sunny Boy wouldn't let anyone but Nelson help him carry in the box, and then the others put their lunch boxes in a pile on the grass just outside the cave and the water bottles were stood carefully upright against a large rock.

Then Sunny Boy announced that the officers of the club must hold what he called an "executive session." He was most proud of that ex-

pression, which he had heard his daddy use, and the other members of the club looked at him respectfully.

"You sit down and wait," Sunny Boy directed the three members who were to be initiated.

Oliver, Carleton, and Leslie sat down, and Sunny Boy, Perry, Nelson, and Jimmie went into the cave. Sunny Boy did most of the talking and as he had his plans well thought out, he could easily make the others understand.

"All right," said Sunny Boy, coming out of the cave. "You can draw slips to see which one is 'nitiated first."

He had three slips of paper in his hand and he held them out. Carleton took one, then Leslie, then Oliver. Oliver's slip, when he turned it over, was numbered 1, Leslie had drawn 3, and Carleton was 2.

"Oliver's first," said Sunny Boy. "Everyone come into the cave, please."

The other boys trooped in after him, and very

cool and dark the cave seemed after the bright sunshine outside.

"You'll have to be blindfolded," said Sunny Boy to Oliver.

He had a large black silk handkerchief in his hand and he tied this over Oliver's eyes.

"Gee, it's pitch dark!" cried Oliver. "I can't see a thing."

"Sit down," Sunny Boy commanded. "Right where you are. That's it. You don't have to be afraid, Oliver; it's all in fun."

Something furry and fat and soft dropped into Oliver's lap on his folded hands.

"The fox!" shouted Oliver. "The fox! Take him away, quick!"

CHAPTER XI

CAVE BOYS ARE BRAVE

A SHOUT of laughter was the only reply to Oliver's plea. The other boys were rolling around the floor of the cave, shrieking with laughter. Oliver tore angrily at the bandage covering his eyes, and then, as he found he could see, he looked down at his hands.

"It's a muff!" he cried, in great disgust.

Sunny Boy wiped his eyes and sat up.

"We didn't mean that, Oliver," he explained. "I meant to use the muff for your hands when you took your second test; but I was holding it and it dropped out of my hands and fell on you. Then you sounded so funny, shouting about the fox!"

The boys laughed again at the recollection and Oliver grinned good-naturedly.

"Anyway, it was fur," he said. "It felt just like a fox to me. What do I do now?"

"Everyone has to pass two tests," explained Sunny Boy. "We won't count this first one—to pass a test you can't be afraid and you mustn't look till we say you can."

Sunny Boy picked up the old brown muff that had belonged to his Aunt Bessie and put it back in the box. Then he tied the bandage over Oliver's eyes again.

"Light the candle, men," said Sunny Boy's voice.

"Put your hand into the flame, Oliver," he said the next moment.

Oliver hesitated, then held out his hand. He felt something hot and stinging, but he refused to jump.

"Are you afraid?" asked Nelson Baker eagerly.

"Of course not," said Oliver stoutly.

"Well, that's all right, because it's only candle grease," Sunny Boy announced calmly. "Now

here's your second test, Oliver, and if you pass it, you're a life member of the Cave Boys' Club."

He pressed something into Oliver's mouth, gently but firmly.

"Blow, Oliver," he directed. "Blow hard!"

Oliver took a deep breath and did his best.

The most awful noise you ever heard filled that cave. It sounded as if seventeen cats, half a dozen dogs, two mad bulls, and at least two dozen lambs were all mixed up in a dreadful fight. Oliver was aghast. He couldn't see what was happening and the harder he blew, the louder the noise sounded. The cave echoed and reëchoed. It was a lucky thing they were so far away from the road and from Centronia, for if anyone had heard the racket he might have sent for the firemen and the police and the militia. That was the kind of noise it was.

Oliver blew and blew, hoping to hear Sunny Boy tell him to stop; but Sunny Boy didn't speak. At last, when he had no more breath, Oliver stopped of his own accord. At first he

could hear nothing except the terrible echoes, but finally the cave was still.

"Well?" said Oliver, taking the thing out of his mouth.

No one answered him.

"Sunny Boy!" called Oliver. "Nelson! Where are you?"

No answer.

"Can I take the handkerchief off?" asked Oliver.

No one answered him, so he shouted. An echo came back to him.

Where could the other boys be? Oliver felt around on the floor of the cave, felt along the walls. Had they all gone home and left him alone?

"Well, I'm going to take this handkerchief off!" cried poor Oliver, tired at last of feeling his way around.

As he said that someone stepped up behind him and touched the handkerchief, which fell

off. There, back in the cave, their faces red with suppressed laughter, stood all the boys!

"Huh, think you're smart, don't you?" said Oliver, rather crossly.

But he cheered up when Sunny Boy told him his troubles were over and that he was a member. Then Oliver Dunlap was ready to help initiate Carleton Marsh, whose turn was next.

Sunny Boy carefully put away the horn he had brought from the Cranberry Farm where he and his mother and daddy had boarded. He thought it was a splendid horn, and the fact that his mother wouldn't let him blow it within a mile of the house didn't change his opinion of it.

Sunny Boy tied the black silk handkerchief over Carleton's eyes and said impressively:

"Forward march, men!"

Sunny Boy on one side of him, Nelson Baker on the other, Carleton felt himself walking forward. It is difficult to march with your eyes closed or bandaged, and two or three times

Carleton thought he was falling and stopped short.

"Now we're going to leave you," announced Sunny Boy presently. "You count fifteen, slowly, then take the bandage off your eyes. You have to find your way back to the cave from here, un—una—ssisted."

Carleton heard footsteps running away from him. He began to count very slowly. When he got up to fifteen, he shouted the number and tore off the handkerchief.

Where was he? He hadn't walked very far blindfolded—at least, it hadn't seemed far; yet here he was in a part of the woods he had never seen before. It was very still—evidently the boys were not going to help him by making any noise to show where the cave was.

Carleton stared around him carefully. He thought he might see a familiar mark of some kind. He wished that he had paid more attention to *seeing,* as his teacher in school was always asking him to do. Some people, the teacher had

said, could walk past a window once—a shop window—and remember everything they had seen in it: others, walking through a strange country for the first time, could remember every path, every turning in their route. They could go back several days later and find their way about as easily as though they had lived in that section all their lives.

It seemed to Carleton that he had never been in this part of the woods before. But he couldn't be sure. How did he know he hadn't been here and had forgotten to use his eyes? Perhaps he had passed these trees on the way to the cave—they looked like trees he had never seen before, but then at this moment he couldn't remember how a single tree looked.

Perhaps the boys had left tell-tale footprints behind them. Carleton dropped to his knees and began to study the ground. No, there were no footprints on the ground. It was too rough and too dry. Carleton wished he had brought bread crumbs in his pockets and scattered them in a

trail—no, he didn't wish that, either; that would be cheating at a time like this. He must find his way back to the cave without any help.

He sat down to dust the dirt and shale from his knees and suddenly the thought of shouting occurred to him. Perhaps he might take the boys by surprise and their answering shout would give him some idea of the direction in which he should go. That wouldn't be cheating, either, because playing tricks on each other was always considered quite fair.

"Hey, Sunny Boy!" shouted Carleton. "Sunny Boy! Where are you?"

An echo came back. "You-u-u!" it called to Carleton.

But not a boy answered. Wherever they were, they were keeping as still as mice—Carleton wondered whether they were within hearing distance at all.

Carleton gazed at one of the big black beetles scurrying about among the twigs on the ground. He wondered how much sense a beetle had. Sup-

pose a beetle should live in the cave—it would have to go home, wouldn't it? Well then, couldn't a boy follow a beetle and so get back to the cave?

"The trouble is," thought Carleton, "I wouldn't know which beetle lived in the cave. I might follow one that lived on the other side of the world. That would be some trip, wouldn't it?"

He got to thinking about beetles that might live on the other side of the world. There was nothing to prevent them from traveling quite around the globe—nothing, that is, unless the ocean would stop them. Carleton couldn't remember about the ocean—could you go round the world without crossing water? There were a great many things he couldn't remember. He almost resolved to pay more attention to his geography lessons in school.

"Only they don't teach you things that are useful," he remarked sociably to a chipmunk that eyed him from the top of a rock. "Now if Miss

Lake talked about beetles going around the world I'd listen and then, when I need to know about it, I would. She never teaches us anything as useful as that. School isn't made interesting—that's the whole trouble."

However, sitting with his back against a comfortable mossy stone was not getting him back to the cave. Unless he got back to the cave he might not be an accepted member of the Cave Boys' Club. Carleton began to realize that it was up to him to see to it that he was received into the Club. It was apparent that no one was going to help him.

"I suppose I'd better walk," he mused. "I could toss up a stone to see which direction to take; the rough side would mean go *that* way, and the smooth side would mean go *this* way."

But he didn't like to start. He was the kind of boy who makes up his mind slowly and then only after he has looked at a question from all sides. How did he know that the cave was *that* way, or *this* way?

Carleton thought for a moment. He was a resourceful lad and he knew that if he started to walk he was just as likely to walk away from the cave as toward it. What was it people lost on a desert island always did? Climbed a tree, of course, to look out over the island.

The only tree that was tall enough to give a view of the country was a sturdy young oak some distance away. Carleton hurried over to it and began to climb.

He was so intent on reaching the top that he did not look up till he suddenly saw a very astonishing thing! A long, black-ribbed stocking, ending in a sturdy tan shoe, dangled within a few inches of his nose!

Carleton looked up. There sat Perry Phelps looking at him rather uncertainly.

"What are *you* doing?" asked Carleton.

"What are *you* doing?" Perry repeated.

"I'm climbing this tree to see whether I can see a way back to the cave," explained Carleton.

"Oh!" Perry said. "Well, I'm sitting here to

watch you. I have to show you the way back if you can't find it."

"I'll find it all right," declared Carleton grimly.

Carleton pulled himself up to a limb and looked around.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed.

He was looking down almost on top of the cave! The tree was around on one side, and the other boys were at the entrance, sitting in a semi-circle. They had heard every word.

Perry began to laugh, and in a moment they were all laughing. Carleton's astonishment was so genuine that Sunny Boy had to show him where they had walked before he would believe it. He had not gone more than twenty yards from the cave, but it had seemed farther because his eyes had been bandaged. Furthermore, when he thought of it, none of the boys had noticed much of the woods around the cave and had not explored it at all. They approached the cave always from the one direction and did

not know how it looked from any other angle.

"We'd all be fooled just as easily as you were," said Sunny Boy, smiling. "Only this happens to be your test."

Carleton allowed his eyes to be bandaged a second time. Sunny Boy took him back into the cave and made him sit down.

"This," said Sunny Boy seriously, "is very valuable. Don't break it."

He put something into Carleton's left hand that felt very tiny and very smooth and as light as glass.

"Be sure you don't break it," cautioned Sunny Boy again. "Hold it like this. There! Now put your other hand here."

Carleton wished the other boys would talk to him, but they kept perfectly still. They were enjoying the "stunts" and they wanted to watch.

Suddenly, behind Carleton, Nelson Baker's voice sounded.

"Oh, listen, Carleton!"

Carleton turned quickly, there was a sharp

snap, whatever he held in his hands broke into two pieces! The other boys groaned in chorus.

"Now you've done it!" they cried accusingly.

"I'll buy you another, Sunny Boy!" said Carleton quickly. "I'm awfully sorry."

"You can't get one as good," Perry declared sorrowfully.

"No, you can't," Jimmie chimed in.

"It was valuable," agreed Sunny Boy.

Carleton put up his hand to the handkerchief. What in the world had he broken? Then he remembered in time and jerked away his hand.

"You pass!" Sunny Boy's voice said, and Sunny Boy's hands untied the handkerchief. "You didn't look and that was the test."

Then Carleton was glad he hadn't looked, but he made up for it by staring around him intently.

"What was it? What did I break?" he asked curiously.

"This," and Sunny Boy held out two pieces of a wishbone.

They were gilded and the gilt was tarnished.

Sunny Boy explained that he had found it in one of the trunks in the attic.

"You looked too funny," Leslie Bradin informed Carleton, "holding the wishbone as if it had been made of glass."

"Well, you'll look funny, too," said Sunny Boy to Leslie. "Come on, it's your turn next."

Leslie had forgotten that for a moment, and he looked serious enough when Sunny Boy tied the black silk handkerchief over his eyes.

"Now we have to go out of the cave," Leslie heard Sunny Boy whisper.

They began to walk slowly, a boy on either side of Leslie. They walked and walked and *walked*. When Leslie had begun to think they must be taking him back to Centronia, they stopped.

"You can't take the handkerchief off, and you have to find your way back to the cave," instructed Sunny Boy.

"How can I unless I can see?" Leslie asked.

"You can hear, can't you?" said Nelson

Baker. "Well, Sunny Boy will play music for you—now and then. You can follow the sound."

Sunny Boy told Leslie to count ten slowly and then start to try to find his way back to the cave, and the initiators went away so silently that the one to be initiated couldn't hear a single footstep, though he listened intently.

He counted ten, then took a step forward. To his surprise he walked into a rock! He turned to the left, and walked into another rock! He turned to the right, took two steps—more rocks!

"I never can find my way back!" he muttered, holding out his hands before him and taking careful steps, because the first time he had bumped his nose and it still smarted.

Every direction he went, he bumped into rocks or a bank of tangled underbrush. He was tempted to lift the handkerchief just long enough for one peep, but he didn't. Then, all at once, he heard music—at least, he decided it was meant to be music. It was a funny kind of

musical squeak, some long squeaks and some short, as though whoever made them wasn't very sure of his instrument.

"That isn't very far away!" said Leslie to himself hopefully.

He stood perfectly still for a moment and thought. Then he stooped down and felt for a stone and put it against the rock wall against which he was leaning. That was to mark his starting place.

Starting from the stone, Leslie began cautiously to feel his way around the rocks. As he had suspected, they formed a jagged wall. Every few minutes he stooped down and felt for his stone. He meant to find out in how large a place he was.

"Eh-ah! Eh-ah!" squeaked the music, much nearer this time.

Leslie jumped, but he didn't act as though he were frightened, neither did he put up the bandage. Instead, he continued to walk, feeling the rocky wall with one hand and holding the other

out in front of him in case he should run into anything.

Then the wall ended! It ended so suddenly that Leslie had no time to catch at anything to save himself. He pitched forward, fell on his knees, then flat on his face. The most horrible squawking and groaning filled the air and then died into silence. The noise had come from directly under Leslie!

CHAPTER XII

CAMPERS MUST EAT

I'VE killed a dog! No—a chicken! I must have fallen on a—a—guinea pig!" thought poor Leslie.

Something was sticking into his stomach in a very uncomfortable manner. Before he could get to his feet, the other boys were helping him up.

"Did I kill anything?" asked Leslie anxiously.

"My goodness, he's mashed it!" someone said.

Sunny Boy laughed—Leslie could tell Sunny Boy's laugh, even in the dark.

"It isn't mashed, only flattened," said Sunny Boy. "Take off the handkerchief, will you, Perry?"

Leslie blinked as Perry Phelps untied the

black handkerchief. He saw the boys standing in a circle. In his hands Sunny Boy held a curious box that seemed to have fluted sides.

"It's Harriet's accordion," Sunny Boy explained, as Leslie stared. "She loaned it to me. I was playing it to let you know where we were. When you got too close I put it down and went back with the other boys, and you fell through the opening, right on top of it and squashed it flat!"

So that was what had happened! Leslie turned suddenly and looked behind him. The boys had not marched him out of the cave at all! That is, they had not really taken him out; they had walked him to the hole at the back—the hole through which Sunny Boy had fallen in—and had left him there.

"Now you know how dark it was the night I was trying to get out of there," said Sunny Boy, putting Harriet's accordion carefully back in the box.

For Leslie's second test, the boys blindfolded him again and sat him down in the cave.

"How much do you want to belong to this club?" asked Sunny Boy.

"Oh, more than anything else," Leslie replied eagerly.

"Enough to eat anything we give you?" asked Sunny Boy. "Enough to eat a piece of rubber?"

"Ye-s," Leslie faltered. "Ye-s, I guess so."

"Then open your mouth," commanded Sunny Boy. "Carleton, give him just a little piece of rubber. It won't hurt you, Leslie, if you chew it up fine."

Leslie obediently opened his mouth, felt something thrust into it, and began to chew. He chewed and chewed and *chewed.* His jaws began to ache and still he chewed. He had never eaten a piece of rubber, and didn't know how long it ought to last, but this piece seemed as large as ever after ten minutes' hard work. He wanted to take it out of his mouth and look at

it, to see if it was ever going to melt; but of course he couldn't take off the handkerchief that covered his eyes. Then he heard a giggle, followed by a snort! His comrades were laughing at him.

"How long do I have to do this?" demanded Leslie. "My jaws hurt now. Can I swallow rubber without chewing it any more?"

"You're all through," Sunny Boy assured him, at the same time untying the handkerchief. "We wanted to see how long you'd do it. That isn't rubber, it's white wax."

Leslie spit the lump of soft wax out into his hand and looked at it curiously. It was very soft, and he had chewed it into a lump. But if he had kept it in his mouth the rest of the day it would never have dissolved.

"Well, everybody passed," remarked Sunny Boy cheerfully. "I'll give out the badges and then we'll eat."

The badges were a surprise to everyone except Sunny Boy, who had made them. He ex-

plained that they were to be worn only at meetings and were to be kept in the cave. They were made of round pieces of felt—Sunny Boy had cut up an old green felt hat of his mother's—and on each round piece were pasted three letters cut out of black felt. C.B.C. the letters read, and of course they meant "Cave Boys' Club."

The members put their badges on the front of their caps and wore their caps while they ate lunch—they couldn't do that at home and it gave them an important feeling. By this time they were very hungry and thirsty, and as Jimmie Butterworth had lost all his drinking water by putting it in the calfskin, his comrades let him have some of theirs. But he pointed out how fine the black and white skin looked on the floor of the cave, and it really did, after Sunny Boy had ripped the stitches out with his pocketknife, so the other members didn't mind if Jimmie did drink twice as much water as anyone else.

"The next time we come, let's cook dinner," suggested Perry Phelps.

"What can we cook?" Sunny Boy asked.

"Oh, corn and potatoes and pancakes and coffee," said Perry airily.

"Bet you can't cook a thing!" Leslie Bradin scoffed.

Perry said that cooking was easy and as some of the other boys were also eager to cook, Sunny Boy said all right, the next time they came, they'd build a fire and cook their dinner.

"But we'd better bring something to eat, too," he declared wisely. "Just in case we don't cook very good things to eat."

Before they went home that afternoon, the boys looked around a little, in the hope of finding Sunny Boy's lost compass. They didn't succeed, but they all decided that the next time they came they would search thoroughly.

"If you lost it anywhere around here, we can find it," asserted Nelson Baker confidently. "It isn't as though people were going through here

all the time, you know; if you lost it around here, it will stay where you lost it till you find it."

Sunny Boy agreed that this was good reasoning, but he pointed out, the trouble was to find *where* he had lost it. Somehow, Sunny Boy didn't have as much confidence in Nelson's ability to find lost things as Nelson had; neither did Sunny Boy think Perry was as good a cook as he claimed to be.

They left their badges in the cave, and the horn; but the other things they had to take back. The boys took turns playing the accordion on the way home; that is, they played it as far as the second house they passed when they came into Centronia. The woman in the third house came out and asked if they had lost their minds or if they were trying to make her lose hers, and Sunny Boy suggested that perhaps people didn't like to hear accordions.

"Some people don't care for music at all," said Sunny Boy mildly, and the other boys

agreed that the woman who made such a fuss must be that kind.

It wasn't easy to arrange for the next meeting, because the different families suddenly found a great many reasons why the boys must be at home for lunch at noon. It seemed almost impossible to find a day when they could all go off together. Sunny Boy's Aunt Bessie came to visit his house one day. After that Perry had to go with his mother to see his great-aunt who only visited Centronia once a year and always stopped at a hotel. Then Jimmie Butterworth had a toothache and his mother took him to the dentist. Another day Leslie had a cousin come to see him, and Nelson Baker's sister Ruth had a birthday party.

At last, however, they managed to choose a day, and then the next difficulty was to get the things to cook. Perry had set his heart on pancakes, and he was much surprised to find he had to have flour and milk or flour and water and salt and an egg. He had set his heart on cook-

ing pancakes, though, and nothing would do but he must try. He begged a frying pan from his mother and the flour and milk, but she said the next time he took good cooking materials he'd have to tell her where he was going and what he intended to do with them.

Leslie Bradin had promised to bring potatoes, but his mother locked the pantry door that morning and all he could find in the cellar were onions. No one knew how to cook them, but Leslie brought them with him. He said onions were better than nothing.

Sunny Boy had sandwiches and cookies and water to drink, and that was as much as he should have been expected to carry; but he went back and got a bag of potatoes when he found that Leslie had not been able to get any.

The other boys, when they met at the white birch tree—for in order to keep the cave a secret, they had decided to never leave home "in a bunch"—reported that they had had a hard time, a very hard time, to get anything to cook.

"Your mother either wants to cook it for you or she says you'll waste good food," said Nelson Baker. "I brought some apples—we can roast them in the ashes."

Jimmie Butterworth had a coffeepot, a mended one, he explained, that was just as good as new except for a little hole in it which he had plugged with a piece of cloth.

"I couldn't get much coffee," he said, "because my mother says coffee isn't good for children. She said to put in plenty of water and it won't hurt us this once."

"Us?" repeated Sunny Boy, in alarm. "You didn't tell her where we were going, did you?"

"No. But my mother said, 'I suppose you're going to play at camping out with the rest of the boys; don't forget to come home at five o'clock,'" Jimmie replied.

That was all right, Sunny Boy informed him, and just then Carleton Marsh and Oliver Dunlap hurried up. They had loaves of bread to be made into toast.

"You can buy it cheaper when it's two days old," said Oliver. "And stale bread is good for you. The cookbook says so."

"I hope you didn't spend all your money," said Jimmie warningly. "I have to collect dues as soon as we get to the cave."

The boys by this time were walking along the road toward the cave, and they discussed the question of dues hotly. Jimmie Butterworth, who was to handle the money, wanted them to be fixed at ten cents a meeting, and Sunny Boy thought that was too much.

"Five cents, then," said Jimmie.

They finally decided on three cents, and Jimmie didn't wait till they reached the cave to collect twenty-one cents (counting his own dues) and tie the pennies carefully in a corner of his handkerchief.

"The very first thing we'll do," said Nelson, as they came in sight of the cave, "is to look for Sunny Boy's compass."

CHAPTER XIII

TOO MANY COOKS

THE seven boys put down their provisions inside the cave and put on their badges. They didn't feel that they could do anything officially until they had their badges on.

"Where do you think you lost the compass, Sunny Boy?" asked Oliver Dunlap seriously.

"For pity's sake!" Sunny Boy regarded Oliver with pardonable exasperation. "I don't know *where* I lost it. If I knew where I lost it, I could go and find it."

This sounded like good logic. The other boys nodded.

"Well, we'll look everywhere," said Nelson Baker.

"I think," said Sunny Boy thoughtfully, "we ought to go through the cave first. I've never

really looked all through the cave. I've *walked* through it, but I wasn't looking all the way."

"Can we take turns using the flashlight?" Leslie Bradin inquired.

Sunny Boy had a flashlight—a present from his Aunt Bessie—and all the boys were eager to use it.

"Yes, ye-s, I suppose so," assented the owner of the flashlight. "But don't anybody burn it all the time; I want the battery to last."

They started through the cave, Sunny Boy in the lead. They examined every inch of the floor, peered behind rocks, even scattered what remained of the fox's chicken bones, as Sunny Boy persisted in referring to the small heap of bones he had found; but nothing that looked at all like a compass could they find. Sunny Boy permitted the use of his flashlight, and weird shadows it made on the rocky walls as the boys flashed it up and down.

They reached the hole at the other end and looked around that. No compass.

"You must have lost it before you fell down here," decided Oliver.

"How can we get to the top?" Leslie asked, looking up at the sky far above them.

"We can't," said Sunny Boy promptly. "We'll have to go out the other way and go around, to find where I was when I fell down. Come on, let's do that."

The boys raced back through the cave, shouting. The echoes made a wonderful racket and there was no one to ask them please not to make so much noise. When they reached the front of the cave, Sunny Boy had a cautious thought.

"It wouldn't be much fun if we lost our way," he suggested. "We might not be able to find the cave in time to cook our dinner. We ought to mark it so we can see it."

"How can you mark it?" asked Jimmie Butterworth.

Sunny Boy considered.

"I could climb that tree," he announced, pointing to a tree close by, "and tie something

Sunny Boy with some difficulty, climbed the tree and tied the white shirt to one of the branches

on it—up high. Something we'd see a long way off."

"What?" demanded Perry Phelps.

Sunny Boy sometimes thought the boys asked most of the questions and he supplied most of the answers, but he was used to that.

"It ought to be white," he declared. "A white dish towel would do."

The only trouble was they had no white dish towel. Jimmie Butterworth had a white handkerchief, but it wasn't "very white," as he said, and it wasn't very large.

"You can have my undershirt," said Carleton Marsh. "That will be good; I don't need an undershirt."

He meant he thought he didn't, because he had a blue blouse over it. He was only too glad to take the white cotton shirt off, and Sunny Boy, with some difficulty, climbed the tree and tied the white shirt to one of the branches.

The boys were so proud of their "signal." as they called it, that they walked backward for the

first eighth of a mile till Leslie fell into a bush and yelled for help.

Sunny Boy and Perry rushed to his rescue. They pulled him out in a jiffy, but unfortunately in doing so they pulled his jacket off of him and a shower of small articles flew in several directions.

"My string ball!" cried Leslie in anguish, forgetting his scratched hands and face. "My pencil with an eraser on it! Oh, my two quarters!"

Sunny Boy paid attention only to this last.

"Did you have two quarters?" he asked. "That's fifty cents."

That seemed a large sum to all the boys, and they remembered that Leslie had grumbled when Jimmie asked him for the three cents as his Cave Boys' Club dues.

"I'm saving them," Leslie explained. "I'm going to open a bank account when I get a dollar."

Sunny Boy was on his hands and knees grub-

bing around in the grass and dirt for the missing property.

"You'd better keep your money in a dish at home," he said severely. "Nobody carries money around when they're saving it."

This excellent advice was a little late, for though the boys searched for a quarter of an hour and though they did find the ball of string (Leslie was saving string, too) and the stubby pencil with the eraser on it, they didn't find the quarters.

"They're gone," said Sunny Boy sadly. "We've looked *everywhere*. They must have landed in some bushes, Leslie. It's too bad."

Leslie took his loss rather philosophically.

"Well, it isn't as if I could spend them," he explained. "My uncle gave them to me for my birthday, but he wouldn't let me spend them. They were saving quarters, and I don't feel so bad as if they'd been spending quarters."

The other members of the Cave Boys' Club could understand this perfectly, and they

marched on, looking carefully for Sunny Boy's compass, but at the same time, seeing birds and squirrels and oddly shaped trees and all the interesting things to be found in the woods.

"I'm going to dig up this little fern for my mother," said Perry Phelps, stopping before a delicate little green plant. "She has a fern collection."

He took out his pocketknife—a beauty with his name on it in silver—and carefully dug around the fern. He wrapped it in his handkerchief and stuffed it into his pocket.

"We ought to be looking for a smooth stone for baking pancakes on," suggested Perry, who had had pancakes on his mind all morning.

"Thought you meant to use the frying pan," remarked Jimmie Butterworth.

They were scrambling through a thicket now, for Sunny Boy was trying to swing over to the part of the woods that he had gone through before he fell down the hole into the cave.

"Well, I want to rest the pan on a stone,"

said Perry. "Hey, fellows, wait a minute. Here's another fern."

The boys stopped.

"Who's got my knife?" asked Perry, kneeling down to look at the fern.

"Nobody—you've got it yourself," Sunny Boy assured him.

"No, I haven't." Perry felt through his pockets hastily. "Say, do you suppose I left it where I dug up the other fern? I don't remember putting it back in my pocket."

Well, that was just what he had done. He had left it on the ground when he'd wrapped the fern in his handkerchief.

"We'll go back," said Sunny Boy. "I don't think we'd better bother looking for the compass any more. Maybe these woods aren't very lucky. We seem to lose a lot of things."

They did, too, when you came to think of it. First Sunny Boy's wonderful compass, then Leslie Bradin's two quarters, and now Perry

Phelps' knife with his name on it in little silver letters.

They thought they walked back exactly as they had come, yet they couldn't find the place where Perry had dug his fern. Sunny Boy remembered it was near a boulder covered with moss, Carleton Marsh had seen a pin oak tree just before they reached the fern, but they couldn't find the place again.

"I'll bet we can't find the cave, either," said Nelson Baker dismally.

Sunny Boy looked up hopefully for his signal. Where was it?

"I never saw such a place for losing things!" exclaimed Sunny Boy in mild impatience. "I'll have to climb a tree and look around."

He was very glad he had thought to mark the cave as he had, because otherwise they might have found it very difficult to get back to it and they might have taken so much time that they wouldn't have had a spare hour left in which to try their cooking ability. But, thanks to Sunny

Boy's foresight, after he had climbed one of the maples by which they were surrounded, he saw something white swinging in and out of the foliage. That was Carleton's undershirt!

"I didn't think it was in that direction at all," confided Sunny Boy to his friends, sliding neatly down the tree. "You sure do get turned around in the woods. We're going in the wrong direction to reach the cave."

He started off confidently, and the others followed him. By this time they were all pretty hungry, and Jimmie Butterworth was wishing loudly for a drink of water.

"Hurrah, the cave!" shouted Nelson, as they came in sight of their starting point once more.

Of course the first thing to do was to build a fire. That sounded easy and Sunny Boy and Leslie volunteered to collect the wood. They gathered dry twigs for "kindling," but all the rest of the wood seemed green. They knew green wood wouldn't burn. Finally, by going some little distance in among the trees, they

found old, dry wood, and when Sunny Boy touched a match to the twigs, the fire began to blaze merrily.

They had built it outside the cave, because they had no way of arranging for the smoke to be carried out of the cave, and, anyway, they needed plenty of room in which to cook. Perry was struggling with his pancake batter and shouting to someone to take the frying pan off the fire.

"You have to get it hot first," argued Leslie, waving the large black pan like a banner.

"What do you suppose is the matter with this stuff?" Perry asked anxiously, trying to pull the spoon out of his mixture.

He had to pull hard, and Sunny Boy, looking over his shoulder, said calmly:

"I think maybe you put too much flour in it."

Perry had poured flour into the milk until it was so thick he could not stir it. As he had no more milk and the boys had already drunk most of the water—except what Jimmie had poured

into his coffeepot—the prospect for pancakes was not very bright.

"Well, put in the potatoes and the apples," suggested Nelson Baker. "Put them under the fire and they'll roast."

"Can't we roast onions, too?" asked Leslie, anxious to have his contribution used.

"We can fry them," Sunny Boy declared, remembering that his daddy liked fried onions.

Sunny Boy had his knife, which was lucky, for of course Perry's was lost. While Nelson arranged the apples and potatoes, poking them under the blazing twigs, Sunny Boy and Leslie took turns chopping the onions, for the tears ran down their faces and they had to relieve each other. When they both cried, Carleton and Oliver borrowed the knife to cut bread and sticks on which to toast it. If Harriet had ever seen the way that knife was used without being washed, she would have been astonished, to put it mildly.

"I'll put the coffee on now," Sunny Boy heard Jimmie Butterworth announce.

He saw Jimmie start toward the fire, saw him step on the egg which the careless Perry had forgotten and left on the ground, slip, and send the coffeepot sailing over the heads of the other boys, who ducked as water and coffee grounds flew in a sudden shower.

Sunny Boy was the first to regain his feet, and he looked toward the fire. Why! He looked again. A wide circle of grass was burning. Dancing, licking, bright flames were crackling beyond the heap of wood they had mounded for their fire.

"Look!" cried Sunny Boy. "It will burn the woods!"

CHAPTER XIV

A DAY OF EVENTS

SUNNY BOY'S first thought was that if Perry Phelps hadn't used all the water for his silly pancakes, they could have put the fire out! His second thought was that they must put it out, anyway. A forest fire was a dreadful thing! Those flames, burning close to the ground, were so quick—even as Sunny Boy ran toward them, they spread, almost like water spreading on a floor.

"Throw dirt on it!" cried Sunny Boy. "Don't throw grass! Leave those branches alone; they're dry stuff and will burn. We have to choke it out."

They had nothing to dig with! In desperation, Sunny Boy seized the old coffee pot and began to scoop industriously. But the dirt he

threw on the fire only checked it in one or two places.

"Dig a ring around it!" he cried, remembering he had seen a man burning leaves in the park do this. "Dig a ring all around the fire and it can't get across it."

Luckily, they had built their fire on a piece of flat ground with no underbrush very near. It was the dry grass that was burning now, but the fire, unchecked, would creep on and on until it reached the bushes; from the bushes it would leap to the trees, and then the whole forest might easily feed the blaze.

Sunny Boy shoveled with the coffee pot, Perry, following his example, used the frying pan; the other boys dug with their feet or their hands, as they could. They could feel the heat of the fire in their faces as they worked, but they persevered and managed to dig an uneven, rough trench that completely surrounded the fire. Breathlessly they watched, thankful there was no wind. The fire licked across the ground,

reached the earth trench, flamed up a little, could not pass the barrier. The boys saw it die out, blacken, first in one place, then another.

"It worked!" exclaimed Perry Phelps. "That was a fine scheme, Sunny Boy! Gee, I thought we never could put it out."

Sunny Boy looked ruefully at the coffee pot.

"I guess that's about used up," he observed.

"It was an old one, anyway," said Jimmie. "We won't have any coffee to drink now, but perhaps it wouldn't have been good coffee, because I never made any before."

"Huh, the coffee was gone before the fire started," said Nelson. "Guess you forgot you stepped on the egg and spilled coffee all over the landscape. Say, do you suppose the potatoes and apples are done?"

Were they done? The boys hurried over to the place where they had built their fire. It had burned out, too, and the ashes, still hot, covered the apples and potatoes. The apples were burned and the potatoes were scorched a little

on top and hard and raw through the centers.

"Well, where are the onions?" asked Jimmie Butterworth, sure that he could make up to the others for this disappointment.

The onions, they discovered, were scattered in every direction. The two cooks, when they had hurried to fight the fire, had sprinkled chopped onion to the four winds.

Sunny Boy giggled.

"I don't believe it's so easy to cook," he decided. "We'll have to eat sandwiches. Harriet made me a lot. I guess we'd better not build another fire."

No one wanted to build another fire, so they ate the sandwiches and cookies Sunny Boy had brought. Their faces and hands were grimy and smoke-stained, but their appetites were perfectly tremendous. Sunny Boy, looking about him as he munched, thought suddenly that they looked like a band of tramps.

"You'd think there'd been a battle around here," he said. "We can't leave the place in a

mess like this; we want to keep it cleaned up. Let's feed the birds the stuff we can't use and kind of pick things up before we go."

The boys were more than willing, though they hadn't before thought about keeping the ground around their cave neat. They broke up the bread Carleton and Oliver had brought and scattered it where the birds would be sure to find it. The burned apples and the scraps of onions and the sticky mess of flour and milk that would never be pancakes, they buried in the ground.

Sunny Boy at first thought they could save the potatoes and cook them again, but when he examined them, so many were cut and bruised, so many burned, that he could see the scheme wasn't practical.

"I think the ants will be glad to use them," he said seriously, having found that ants came running to find any food left on the ground.

So the boys buried the potatoes, too, and tramped down the ashes of the fire to make sure every last spark was out.

It was time to start for home when all this work of clearing up was finally finished, and they were more than half way there when Carleton remembered his undershirt, left dangling on the tree.

"This," said Sunny Boy, "has been a day of events."

The others had to agree with him, as they all turned and plodded back to the cave. They couldn't expect Carleton to go home without his shirt, for his mother, of course, wouldn't like that.

Sunny Boy, as soon as he was actually at home in his own house found the "events" were not all over yet. His mother announced, the moment she saw him, that she had news to tell him.

"Nice news?" asked Sunny Boy absent-mindedly, taking the lid off the candy jar on the living room table.

He was hungry, because the lunch at the cave hadn't been such a success, and Harriet's sand-

wiches, divided among seven boys, didn't go very far.

"Don't spoil your appetite for dinner," said Mrs. Horton, moving the candy jar out of reach.

"What do you think, Sunny Boy? Grandpa and Grandma Horton are coming to visit us!"

"They are? When? Can I go to meet them at the train? How long will they stay? Oh, Mother——"

Sunny Boy stopped suddenly, but Harriet, setting the table for dinner in the next room, laughed.

"You sound like a question box, Sunny Boy," she teased.

Mrs. Horton glanced at Sunny Boy keenly.

"What were you going to say, dear?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, nothing," Sunny Boy answered, and then his mother saw that his blouse would never in the wide world, so she said, do to wear to the the table and she sent him upstairs to put on

a clean one and to wash his face and hands.

Sunny Boy went soberly. He had remembered the compass. Grandpa Horton had given it to him and Grandpa had said he thought Sunny Boy was old enough to be trusted with valuable things now. What would his grandfather say when he heard that the compass was lost?

All through dinner Sunny Boy was very quiet. Not even when he heard that Grandpa Horton would arrive early the next morning and probably in time for breakfast did he talk as he usually did. His daddy said he might go to the station with him, if he was up in time, and Sunny Boy said listlessly:

"All right."

After he was in bed that night, his mother came in as she always did, to see that the windows were open and the curtains pinned back and the blanket folded where Sunny Boy could reach it if a cold wind suddenly blew on him.

"What's the matter, Sunny Boy?" asked Mrs.

Horton, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "Something worrying you, dear?"

"How did you know?" Sunny Boy said in relief. "I—I lost the compass, Mother; the compass Grandpa gave me."

Mrs. Horton was sorry, but she said she knew Sunny Boy hadn't meant to lose the lovely present. It was too bad to be careless, she said, but that wasn't nearly as serious as many other faults. And she asked where Sunny Boy had lost the compass and when, and he found himself telling her all about the cave and the Cave Boys' Club.

"So that's where all the food has been going!" said Mrs. Horton, her voice sounding as though she might be smiling in the dark. "Harriet has been worried—she thought perhaps you and the boys were trying to open a grocery store somewhere!"

Sunny Boy laughed. He felt much better now. If his mother didn't scold about the compass, why, surely, Grandpa Horton wouldn't.

And, my, wouldn't it be fun to see his grandpa the next morning!

Mrs. Horton kissed him and whispered that she hoped he'd take more care of his things another time and then she went away and Sunny Boy went to sleep and never knew another thing until his daddy called to him that in fifteen minutes it would be time to start for the train.

Sunny Boy tumbled out of bed and dressed in a jiffy and was on the platform when Grandpa and Grandma Horton came down the car steps.

"Bless me, is this my grandson?" said Grandpa Horton, pretending not to know him until Sunny Boy pulled his coat sleeve.

CHAPTER XV

THE HONORARY MEMBER

GRANDPA HORTON was so nice! Sunny Boy had forgotten how nice he was, and, driving home, he discovered it all over again. Grandma Horton was a gray-haired lady who didn't like automobiles much—not when they were on city streets—and she worried for fear Sunny Boy's father would drive into a truck. But Grandpa Horton had so much to say, he didn't even know when they passed a truck.

"You wouldn't know Araminta now, Sunny Boy," said Grandpa Horton. "She's as tall as Grandma. And every last one of the Hatch children, when they heard we were coming to Centronia, sent their love to you."

Sunny Boy remembered Araminta, a red-

headed young girl who helped Grandma Horton with the housework. And the Hatch children—there were six of them—were Araminta's brothers and sisters. Araminta made the seventh.

Sunny Boy's mother and Harriet had a nice hot breakfast waiting for the guests, and afterward Sunny Boy's daddy said he was awfully sorry, but he had to go to the office.

"I arranged to have the entire day off. Then the telephone rang, and there's a man coming in I'll just have to see," he explained. "Sunny Boy, can you take care of Grandpa in my place?"

"Of course," Sunny Boy declared stoutly.

Grandma Horton went upstairs with Mrs. Horton to unpack her bag and rest after the train trip, and Sunny Boy and Grandpa Horton went on the back porch where they could talk. Sunny Boy thought he might as well tell the bad news and get it over with.

"Grandpa," he began, standing up very straight, "I'm sorry—I'm awfully sorry—but I

lost the compass. The compass you gave me, you know."

Grandpa Horton didn't look shocked. He took a knife out of his pocket and a piece of wood, and began to whittle.

"Well, now, I'm sorry to hear that," he admitted. "That compass was in our family a good many years. I thought it was a pretty nice pocket-piece. But you didn't want to lose it and accidents happen to the best of us. Don't you suppose I could find it for you, maybe?"

"No-o," said Sunny Boy, shaking his head, "I don't believe you could find it, Grandpa. I lost it in the woods."

"I'm pretty good at finding things," Grandpa Horton assured him. "Got a knack that way, if I do say it myself. How did you come to lose the compass?"

Sunny Boy told him. Told him about the picnic and the hole down which he had fallen and the cave and the secret club. Grandpa Horton was the kind of person you told things to; you

knew he wouldn't tell anyone else without first consulting you.

"I saw a fox in the cave, too," said Sunny Boy. "And afterward I found bones—I guess he'd been eating a chicken."

"So?" Grandpa Horton answered. "Did I ever tell you about a cave I had when I was a boy?"

Sunny Boy sat down on the top step, his eyes shining.

"Oh, Grandpa, did you have a cave, too?" he asked.

"A regular, deep one, right in the heart of the woods," said Grandpa Horton. "I used to spend the night in it sometimes, when I was collecting the sap from the maple sugar buckets; my father had a grove of trees and I had to watch all the buckets every spring.

"Well, one cold day, snow on the ground and a mean wind blowing, I thought I'd build a fire near my cave and have some hot coffee for my lunch. I kept matches in the cave and I went

in to get one, and there I saw two wild green eyes glaring at me and something snarled!"

"Oh, my!" cried Sunny Boy, wishing that Nelson Baker could hear this exciting story.

"Yes, sir, I jumped back, I don't mind admitting," Grandpa Horton said. "I'd never been face to face with a wildcat before, and a half-starved, fighting-mad critter at that. But I wanted my matches and the wildcat wouldn't budge, so it was up to me to get a club and go after him.

"He kept snarling and spitting and I didn't want to get within reach of his claws, but when my foot slipped, I forgot everything except that I wasn't going to be bested by a big cat. I went down and rolled over, but the wildcat was quicker, and he landed on me. I can feel his claws in my back yet! I rolled for the door, and if anyone had been there he would have heard some great yelling and scuffling, I tell you."

"Oh-h, what happened?" breathed Sunny Boy, so excited he almost rolled off the steps himself.

"We scuffled and fought and rolled our way out into the open," his grandpa said, "and then the wildcat let go and streaked for the woods. I up with a handy rock and let it fly. As luck would have it, I caught him on the head and stunned him, and then I finished him with my shotgun, so he wouldn't suffer. I was all scratched up, but I didn't mind that. There was a bounty on wildcat skins that year, and I collected the money and put it in the bank."

Sunny Boy didn't understand what a "bounty" was and Grandpa Horton explained that it was a sum of money the state paid for the skin of certain wild animals they wished exterminated.

"Maybe there'll be a wildcat in my cave some day," said Sunny Boy hopefully.

"Better not let your mother hear you say that," Grandpa Horton laughed. "No, I guess there aren't many wild animals in the woods around here any more. I'd like to see your cave,

though, Sunny Boy. Could a non-member see it, do you think?"

"You could," Sonny Boy assured him. "I'm president of the club, and I can take anyone there. Let's go now, shall we, Grandpa?"

Grandpa Horton was willing, but they had to wait till after lunch because the trunk came and Grandma Horton wanted Grandpa to unlock it and find the presents they had brought Sunny Boy. He liked them all—a new game and a jar of stick candy, the kind the store at Cloverways sold and which Araminta remembered Sunny Boy had liked when he visited the farm, but most of all he liked the little flat wallet with his name on it in gold letters.

"Perry Phelps lost his knife. That had his name on it, too," said Sunny Boy, as after lunch he and Grandpa Horton set out for the woods.

"And Leslie Bradin lost two quarters. They were trying to help me find my compass. Leslie didn't care, because he couldn't spend the money, but Perry misses his knife."

Grandpa Horton was much interested in the cave. He said he thought it was larger than the one he had had as a boy, better, too, because his cave had only one opening.

"Let's look around for your compass," he suggested to Sunny Boy. "I'm really very good at finding things; your Grandma always sets me to hunting for anything she loses and I nearly always find it."

Sunny Boy didn't believe Grandpa Horton could find the compass, but he took out his searchlight and together they began to look. They reached the hole at the back of the cave without finding anything.

"Is this where you fell down?" asked Grandpa Horton. "My, my, that was a tumble! Have you looked all around the ground here?"

"Yes, Grandpa," Sunny Boy nodded. "I thought perhaps my compass fell out of my pocket as I fell down, but I've looked and the boys looked, too. We couldn't find it. I don't believe it's here."

Grandpa Horton was squinting up at the layers of rock, tufted with bushes and bits of moss.

"Do you think you could stand on my shoulders?" he said to Sunny Boy. "You might feel around on some of these rocky shelves; the compass might have got caught as you slid down."

This was a new idea to Sunny Boy, and he was eager to try it out. He remembered he had fallen down the dirt side of the hole. He pointed out the place to Grandpa Horton, who then stood with his back against that side while Sunny Boy scrambled up on his shoulders.

Nothing but dirt—Sunny Boy explored with his fingers. Nothing but sticks and moss—Sunny Boy felt around the roots of a bush. Nothing but gravel—gravel and—and—something hard and round and smooth!

"Oh, Grandpa!" It was a wonder Sunny Boy didn't tumble off backward, and if his grandpa hadn't grabbed him, he might have done so. *"Grandpa! Look!"*

In his right hand Sunny Boy held the com-

pass. It had been shaken out of his pocket as he tumbled down the hill into the hole!

"Didn't I tell you I was pretty good at finding things?" asked Grandpa Horton, just as someone shouted at the front of the cave.

"Sunny Boy! Sunny Boy Horton! Sunny Bo-oy!"

"That's Nelson!" cried Sunny Boy. "Wait till he sees my compass."

Nelson, still calling, came dashing through the cave, followed by Leslie Bradin, Perry Phelps, and Jimmie Butterworth.

"We stopped at your house and your mother said you'd gone to the woods—Oh!" said Nelson, seeing Grandpa Horton for the first time.

"This is my grandfather," said Sunny Boy, with dignity. "Look, Nelson, we found the compass! It was on a ledge!"

The boys were as surprised as Sunny Boy had known they would be. They wanted to hear just how he had found his compass and they had to climb up and feel of the ledge for themselves.

"I'll bet Grandpa can find your knife, Perry," said Sunny Boy. "He can find anything. And your quarters, too, Leslie."

Leslie brightened at that.

"I could spend them now," he said hopefully. "My uncle gave me two more to put in my bank."

Grandpa Horton laughed and said he couldn't find everything, but he thought it would be fun to go out in the woods and see what luck they might have.

He made the boys tell him as nearly as they could remember where they had gone and what they had done the day they had lost their possessions. Then he divided them up into three groups and sent them looking in pairs.

"Hurrah!" Sunny Boy heard Perry shout half an hour later. "Here it is! Just where I left it after digging the fern. It's been rained on and I guess the blades are a little rusty, but I can clean them with oil."

"I told you my grandpa could find anything," said Sunny Boy proudly.

They continued to hunt for Leslie's quarters, but a small piece of money is harder to find than a lost pocketknife. They were about ready to give up and and go back to the cave when Sunny Boy shouted.

"Look! Look! Here's one, Leslie!"

Sure enough, Sunny Boy had found one of the missing quarters. The boys scrambled frantically around the grass where he had discovered it, but they couldn't find the second quarter. It must have rolled farther away and perhaps been buried in dirt when it rained, Grandpa Horton said.

"I've had a quarter's worth of fun, galloping about," he declared. "You take this, Leslie, and we'll call the hunt off. Now you're all right again, aren't you?"

He handed Leslie a brand new quarter and the members of the Cave Boys' Club beamed.

"I wish you belonged to this club," said Leslie, a little shyly.

"He can be an honorary member!" Sunny Boy was the lad who could think quickly. "Would you like to be an honorary member of this club, Grandpa?"

Dear me, there wasn't any doubt of it. Grandpa Horton looked so pleased that his smile was promptly reflected in five bright faces.

"Why!" Sunny Boy made another discovery, "all the officers are here. We can elect him just as easy! The president, the vice president, the secretary and the treasurer are here. Leslie repre—repre—Leslie represents the members and he can vote, too. All in favor of electing Mr. Arthur Bradford Horton an honorary member of the Cave Boys' Club, say Aye."

A shout of "aye!" went thundering up.

"Anyone against it, say No."

"The ayes have it," announced Sunny Boy.

He shook hands solemnly with Grandpa Horton and the other boys did, too.

"Didn't we pass an ice-cream store on our way to the cave?" Grandpa asked seriously.

"Oh, yes," Sunny Boy replied. "Herman's."

"That's the one," agreed Grandpa Horton. "Now, if we can get the other members of this club together, I think we might stop in there for some ice-cream."

The boys were all willing to help. Leslie dashed ahead to get Oliver Dunlap and Carleton Marsh, and the other boys, with Grandpa Horton, walked more slowly. They all met at the ice-cream store door, and five minutes later Grandpa Horton lifted a spoon of chocolate ice-cream solemnly.

"To the Cave Boys' Club!" he whispered.

"To the Cave Boys' Club!" echoed Sunny Boy, the president, and popped a spoonful of vanilla ice-cream into his mouth.

THE END

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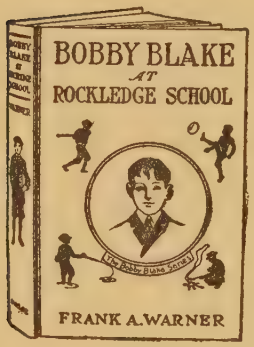

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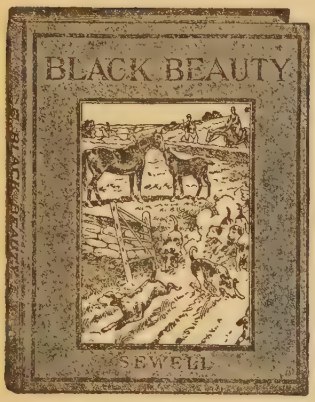

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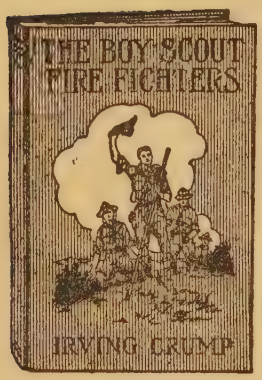

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